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No. 47

N° 47

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 2 March 2006

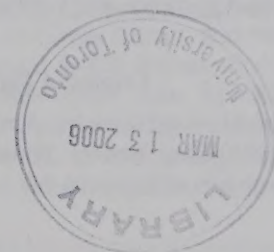
Jeudi 2 mars 2006

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 2 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 2 mars 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

CONSUMER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT (INTERNET GAMING ADVERTISING), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR

(PUBLICITÉ DES JEUX SUR INTERNET)

Mr. Leal moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 to regulate the promotion and advertising of Internet gaming in Ontario / Projet de loi 60, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2002 sur la protection du consommateur afin de réglementer la promotion des jeux sur Internet en Ontario et la publicité qui en est faite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Leal, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker and fellow members, I rise in the House today to speak in support of my private member's bill entitled the Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Internet Gaming Advertising), 2006. This bill is intended to stop the advertising of Internet gaming websites, which are not licensed by the appropriate authority in Ontario or Canada and operated in accordance with the applicable laws in the province of Ontario.

First of all, I'd like to take a moment to mention Ms. Jane Holmes, vice-president of the Woodbine Entertainment Group, who has joined us in the gallery today, who has worked with me over the last year and has supported me on this issue during our deliberations to develop this bill. Ms. Holmes has been very determined to protect and see that Ontario's horse racing industry prospers, and we certainly welcome Ms. Holmes to our gallery today.

I'd also like to commend my special assistant, André Nicoletti, who has coordinated a lot of research in developing this bill as we move forward. He indeed needs to be commended for all his work.

Since the Internet has become a common medium, several of Ontario's—and Canada's, for that matter—legal gaming operations have been subject to fierce competition from illegal interests. The growth of illegal

Internet gaming sites, onshore and offshore, is a real and serious threat to the future viability and integrity of both the horse racing industry and government-operated gaming. Oftentimes, but not always, because these illegal operations are harboured offshore, it makes them difficult to legally confront. As I'm sure you're well aware, drafting related legislation regarding matters outside of Canada's borders is very complex.

Fifteen years ago, there were no gaming operations in Canada. Then the federal government gave the provinces a monopoly on commercial gaming, lotteries, casinos, slot machines, raceinos—which are tracks with slot machines—and video lottery terminals proliferated. The idea was that local gaming industries could provide much-needed funding for Ontarians.

Today, there are over 100,000 places to make a bet in Canada. Canadians and visitors can choose to gamble at thousands of VLTs, slot machines, lottery ticket centres, bingo halls with permits, 59 permanent casinos, 70 race-tracks—some with slot machines—and many tele-theatres. They are great revenue generators for the province today.

However, today there are also over 1,800 Internet gaming sites and counting. One estimate is that the global Internet gaming market will grow from—these are in United States dollars—\$10 billion in 2002 to \$14.5 billion in 2006. The growth has been absolutely explosive. In another recent media report, pokerroom.com indicated that they have 25,000 new players each week and that Canada is the second-largest market.

Not only has Canada's gaming industry been forced to deal with illegal competition, but similar action is taken in other countries, such as Great Britain and the United States. It is estimated, again in US dollars, that offshore gaming business generates more than \$1 billion US annually, even though online gambling is illegal in the United States. As in Canada, internationally based legal gambling operations find the solution to this issue difficult to control.

What exactly is the big lure of Internet gaming? Internet gaming offers the excitement of traditional gambling but has the added advantage of the convenience of gambling from home. All that is required is a personal computer and a connection to the Internet. Gambling sites are open for business 24 hours a day, attracting consumers with flashy websites. People are often lured to illegal sites by bait-and-switch tactics, and thus make purchases they hadn't originally intended.

As can many of my colleagues in my Legislature, I'd like to draw upon instances where Ontario's gaming in-

dustry is a positive and responsible local contributor. For example, the horse racing industry is a key economic contributor to the rural community. In fact, Kawartha Downs, which has gaming entertainment such as harness racing, stock car racing and slots, provides many jobs to the people of my riding of Peterborough, the riding of Victoria-Haliburton and the city of Kawartha Lakes.

Further to economic issues, I'm also deeply concerned that illegal Internet gaming poses gambling-related health problems to people in this province. Illegal gambling websites do not contribute tax revenues or support charitable organizations, as do provincial, arm's-length, regulated corporations, such as the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation. Illegal gaming websites reinforce the concept that there is an easy way to make money, which is a dangerous idea, especially when a complete stranger has access to your credit card.

The Canadian horse racing industry has been negatively impacted by the massive growth of online book-making operations, which have not been granted regulatory approval in Canada. This leads not only to an economic loss for Ontarians, but a social loss. These illegal Internet operators, otherwise known as bookies, who take bets on horse racing do not incur the cost of a racetrack to conduct and support live racing, nor do they contribute to the horse person's purse account. Licensed racetracks are unable to compete, with significant infrastructure and overhead costs.

The illegal Internet operators are taking consumers from the legal industry without any law enforcement response. The Woodbine Entertainment Group estimates that offshore Internet gaming has impacted its operation by over \$100 million annually. There are hundreds of Internet sites taking bets on Woodbine horse racing product without any commercial agreement to do so.

For the online gambler, the industry's lack of regulation should raise some bright red flags. Online gambling is a risky business, as the player has no real idea who is running the website and how to contact the company should the need arise. For example, how do gamblers know these companies will deliver their winnings should they actually beat the odds?

1010

There's also a great social concern, especially for Ontario's youth, as many of the online gambling sites do not restrict access of minors. Studies have shown conclusively that while various companies offer age verification systems specifically designed to block accounts from minors, many sites do not use them. This is similar to many pornographic websites.

There are also concerns about money laundering, involvement of organized crime and potential for fraud through offshore Internet gaming operators. In 2004, an online gaming operation, Sporting Options in the United Kingdom, declared bankruptcy and 5,300 account holders could not get their money. Approximately £3.6 million was owed to clients.

As Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman said on September 16, 2005, when he re-

leased Stanley Sadinsky's report, Review of the Problem Gambling and Responsible Gaming Strategy of the Government of Ontario, "I am also in favour of addressing responsible gambling in terms of health promotion. It is my hope that Ontario's gaming industry can continue to deliver quality service to Ontarians in an efficient and socially responsible manner."

Let's be clear. Internet gaming is already illegal in Canada under the Criminal Code. I've attempted to draft related legislation that doesn't mirror federal law that exists within that code. It would seem that the problem lies in the area of the enforcement of existing law that already contains provisions relating to the advertising of gaming activities. These provisions appear insufficient to deal with the situation effectively, and of course it's hard to see what meaningful legislative steps might be taken.

I've therefore proposed to the Legislature a bill that would complement the Criminal Code and require marketers and advertisers not to enter into contracts for the provision of marketing advertising services to Internet gaming businesses that do not operate pursuant to applicable Canadian law.

I believe that the ideas and intentions of Bill 60 are important to the people of Ontario and Canada. Society will benefit on many levels, economically and socially, from the reduction of a growing problem. I hope that all members of this Legislature of all political stripes will look at this bill and think carefully as to what its intentions are. It is not intended that we intrude on Canadians' freedom of speech, but that we try to remedy a problem that already exists.

The financial lure of Internet gaming is enormous. However, legal gambling activity in Canada employs an estimated 47,500 persons as either regulators or operators of gambling for government or within gaming management companies.

One of the key strengths of gaming lies with the income-generating power of the industry, thus ensuring its continued support from local municipalities and provincial and federal governments. The fact that charities, hospitals, mental health and addiction projects and cultural projects benefit from money poured into the gaming industry gives the legal industry an added boost.

Bill 60 will benefit all Ontarians, and I look forward to the debate further on this matter this morning.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): I am pleased to join the debate today on the bill brought forward by my colleague from Peterborough. We share a very close working relationship, having neighbouring ridings. Kawartha Downs, as he mentioned, is a key player in both our communities. It's right on the boundary of the Peterborough riding and my riding of Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, and it employs people in both ridings. We've certainly benefited from that positive role that Kawartha Downs plays in our communities.

There are many communities that have seen similar direct economic benefits. Ontario's 16 slot machine facilities at racetracks have created more than 4,100 jobs,

with an estimated annual payroll of \$154 million. That is money that is spent in the smaller communities where these employees make their homes.

The provincial slots-at-racetracks program is also very important in terms of the continued viability of the horse racing industry. It has allowed for improved facilities and increased purses, which lead to horses of better quality and overall improved racing. The horse racing industry is very important in Ontario. Since the slots have come to Kawartha Downs to go with the track, the number of horses that you see on the farms in both my riding and the member for Peterborough's has increased. The interest is there, and the economic impact is very positive for our ridings.

As I've found out since the member introduced this bill, horse racing is the province's third-largest agricultural industry, spending more than \$1 billion annually. I don't think a lot of people really realize that.

The slot machine revenue is divided in a way that benefits the track owners and employees as well as the host municipalities. The host municipalities receive 5% of the gross revenues on the first 450 slot machines and 2% of the gross revenues from any additional machines. I can see first-hand in the municipality of Cavan-Millbrook-North Monaghan, in which Kawartha Downs is located, that they are able to contribute back to their community in very positive ways.

The purses at those racetracks with slot facilities have gone up, and that helps the horse racing industry in a very direct way. It's also worth nothing, though, that some of the gross slot revenue from charity casinos and slot facilities at racetracks in Ontario goes to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for problem gambling research, treatment, prevention and public awareness. In 2003-04, this accounted for \$21 million. You can be sure that the Internet gaming sites don't make any contribution of this type.

There has been a tremendous surge in popularity of the Web sites that operate in a grey area of the law. Anyone who uses a computer can see that they pop up quite frequently on your screen. They allow the use of play money, but these sites skirt the law by advising people by e-mail of where they can visit a site where gambling with real money takes place. There is concern among mental health professionals about the lack of support for problem gamblers on these sites. And there is very real concern because there is no way to ensure that people gambling online are of legal age to do so. That was certainly brought to our attention yesterday at the government agencies committee by a gentleman who is going to be appointed as a board member for the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp.

These websites are businesses that operate outside Canadian law. They are competing directly with legal businesses in Ontario, businesses that create jobs in communities across the province and businesses that must operate in a socially responsible manner. It's not a level playing field, and it does threaten to take away local jobs.

Another issue that is important to recognize is that Internet gaming takes place essentially behind closed doors. We have no idea how widespread it is, and it's very difficult for us to track the level of gambling taking place. In Ontario, we're able to track whether there has been any increase in the number of people gambling and how much is being spent at our casinos and racetracks and how many lottery tickets are sold. We can tailor our efforts to problem gamblers by using that information.

The Criminal Code makes it illegal to advertise Internet gambling in Canada, but some have found a way around the rules, a loophole that allows them to do it anyway. If we can help to shut that loophole, I think we should try to do so.

The people who are trying to evade the rules are creative. We need to be equally creative in finding ways of stopping them from doing so.

Businesses that are here legitimately in Ontario should not have to compete against companies that would not meet the test to do business here. They hide in foreign jurisdictions, thumbing their noses at the protections we have put in place in Ontario for Ontario residents, and it's not right. I am not sure if this is the exact wording needed to shut the door, but I think we should move forward with this bill. I want to work closely with the member from Peterborough, not just because we share Kawartha Downs and the employment and economic benefits that occur there, but because I believe it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I'm probably going to be the odd person out on this particular debate. I want to lay out my reasons why I think this is probably not a good idea.

Is the goal a good idea? Of course it is. We need to do all we can in our society to protect people from themselves, quite frankly, when it comes to the avails of gambling. The problem is not the weekend gambler or the holiday gambler who goes into a casino and says, "Okay, honey, we're each going to take \$100 and go out to play blackjack or hold 'em poker or slot machines," or whatever it might be. You lose your hundred bucks and you leave. It's entertainment. I don't see anything wrong with that. I don't see anything wrong with people wanting to play a friendly game of cards on a Saturday night in their home. The big game now is hold 'em poker. Personally, I'm a poker player. I love to play dealer's choice poker. We do that probably five, six times a year during the winter. We get together with some friends, we buy \$10 worth of poker chips and play some poker. Oh, my God, I just broke the law, didn't I? But I can say that in this Legislature. Nobody gets hurt; the most you can lose is \$10 for a night. There's nothing wrong with gambling; I want people to understand.

1020

I like to bet on horses. I've not had much success lately, but again, it's a question of being responsible. I'll go to the track or to the off-track betting from time to time, and I'll say, "I'm going to spend \$50, \$60, \$100," depending on what I think I can lose, and then I go out

and do what I've got to do. Sometimes I win. My best story is that a guy by the name of Don Dewsbury, a good friend back in Timmins, a councillor, one day introduced me to off-track betting. He said, "Why don't you come?" I said, "Sure." So we walk into the off-track betting place and I say, "Don, what do I do?" He says, "You've got to make an exactor bet." And I said, "Exactor bet? What in the heck are you talking about?" So he said, "You pick two horses. Each horse has odds, and based on the outcome of the race, if they come in one and two, you're going to get the combined odds of those horses." I looked at it and said, "Well, I'm going to pick the two horses with the longest odds. I can make the most money." Well, wouldn't you know? It was my first bet and I won. On a \$2 bet, we won \$1,600. We split on that ticket, because I told him, "Give me a buck and I'll go and bet." Don, I want to thank you for introducing me to betting.

But I've got to tell you, it was also the worst thing I ever did, because all of a sudden I thought I was smart, so I started betting the horses—never in a serious way, but I started going more often than I should have. It didn't take long until I lost that \$800. I learned my lesson after the four or five weekends in a row that it took me to lose it. I said, "Well, now I understand. There is a bit of a luck factor to this and also a bit of skill." I always remember being at Woodbine one day when I met this guy who has been doing this for years, going around the world betting on horses. I was watching him and his methodology of placing his bet. I said, "Jeez, that's really interesting." He said, "Well, it's a sucker's game. At the end of the day, I probably win no more than anybody else."

My point is that there's nothing wrong with gambling, nothing wrong with betting. The issue is, to what extent can you afford to lose? I know it's a bit of a defeatist attitude, but I walk into a casino or a poker game or an off-track betting place in my mind saying, "How much can I afford to lose?" If I can afford to lose 50 bucks, that's all I'm going to play.

The issue is that there are people who go beyond that limit, and they're the ones, quite frankly, that we need to be worried about as a society. I'm going to lay out why I think this legislation may not do what we want in the end.

We have a habit here in this Legislature, as we do across this country—I want to say, first of all, that I'm a New Democrat. For people who are watching back home, they're going to think this is really odd coming from an NDP-er. But we have this reaction of, "Oh, there's a problem. Let's pass legislation and outlaw it. That's going to fix the problem." The problem is that far too often it makes us believe we've fixed the problem, but it actually does nothing or sometimes goes in quite the opposite direction.

I want to use this particular bill as an example. Should we find a way to curb people's problem betting habits? Yes. I agree with the member and I know why he is doing it, for all the honourable reasons. But what's the most effective way of doing that? Do we bring in a law

that says, as this bill does, that you can't advertise in Ontario websites that promote betting for money on the website, whether on horses, cards or whatever it might be? Let's say we pass the law; it gets third reading and becomes the law of the land. How the heck do you enforce that, first of all? Very difficult to do. It may have some effect. I won't say it won't have any effect—that would be unfair—but it's really not going to have the effect we want, because at the end of the day, those who want to gamble are going to gamble. It's not the law that's going to stop them from gambling.

When gambling was illegal, we all saw—a better example is that, when booze was illegal during the years of Prohibition, drinking went up because it was cool to do. You were breaking the law. It was kind of in the dark, in the shadows of our society, and it became kind of a neat thing to do. Gambling, I think, is in much the same vein as that. People are going to do it because they want to gamble. I think where you're better off spending your time is in trying to do some education through advertising and through programs to try to get people not to become problem gamblers in the first place, and, for those who do become problem gamblers, to help them deal with their addiction, because it is an addiction. If we were to come at it from the perspective of saying to people, "You need to be responsible when it comes to gambling" and deal with people's addictions, in the end we would probably get a much better effect in dealing with the problem gamblers, because that's who the member wants to get at.

Let me use an example: When I was a kid growing up, as everybody around here knows who is about the same age, drinking and driving was almost an accepted thing. I remember my father—I can tell you all kinds of stories where he would go out on a Saturday afternoon and we'd be in the car with him, and he'd go somewhere and have a couple of beers too many, and he would just jump in the car and he would drive us back and we'd sit on the tailgate of the truck or the station wagon. It was just the thing you did, going down a country road. Everybody would laugh, and all of a sudden the OPP guy would see that Dad was weaving around a little bit too much and he'd pull him over and say, "Hey, Mr. Bisson, be careful, eh? Make sure to go straight home," and he never got charged. It was accepted. People drank and drove, and people died.

At one point, society said, "Enough is enough." We passed some laws that penalize people for drinking and driving. No question it had an effect, but we spent enormous amounts of money provincially and nationally to educate people that drinking and driving leads to death. So eventually we changed the culture of our society to not accept that drinking and driving was a good thing.

So 20 years ago—well, more than 20 years ago. Jeez, I've been married for 30 years, so probably around 40 years ago, when I was a kid, basically it was an accepted thing to go out and drink and drive. Nowadays, it doesn't happen to anywhere near that extent. I'm not saying it doesn't happen at all, but it is really one of those taboos in our society.

I was at a reception here around Christmastime—I can't remember if it was the press party or what it was—and one of our colleagues here—I'm not going to say who it was—had a couple of drinks. It just hit me right away, and the person said, "Okay, let's jump in a cab." It was just automatic. Nobody said, "Where are the keys for my car?" It was just automatic: Leave the keys here, jump in a cab; let's go. Everybody went off; we took cabs and went home. It's what we do. It's natural now. Why? Because we've educated people. We've said to them, "Listen, you cannot drink and drive. You're going to run somebody over. You're going to kill yourself or you're going to kill somebody else, and it is the wrong thing to do." Organizations like MADD—Mothers Against Drunk Driving—played a huge, huge role, and still do, in trying to sensitize people in our society to the wrongs of drinking and driving.

My point is, that's the approach I think we need to take with gambling. We need to take that seriously, because there is much more gambling going on in our society. I, as a New Democrat, have no problem with gambling. I think gambling is all right, as long as it's done responsibly. It's like drinking: Drinking is okay as long as it's not done to excess and is done responsibly. I would argue what we need to do is put some emphasis on public education and on dealing with the addictions once they have them.

A really interesting thing occurred to me the other day. I was at home last weekend, not feeling too well on Friday night. So I said, "I'll go pick up a couple of movies." I picked up a movie, the one with Al Pacino about a sports betting guy. I forget the name of the movie. Somebody can help me out. It's *Two for the Money*. There is a fascinating scene in it that I think says everything. Al Pacino, who is a great actor—he's one of my favourites—walks into a Gamblers Anonymous meeting and all these ex-gamblers are sitting there going through the process of the meeting to deal with their gambling. He goes there and he has this big diatribe about why these people should all bet, and basically uses it as a way to give out his business card to get people to bet, because they are the big gamblers that he normally gets money from as a betting guy.

It was quite unbelievable: A guy walks into a Gamblers Anonymous thing, he does his dialogue, gives them all his card and walks out. The guy he's with says, "That's terrible." He says, "You need to understand what it is with the gambler. It's not winning that hooks them; it's losing. It's the rush of losing and putting on the line everything you've got and losing it that keeps you going back." All of a sudden, I said, "Boy, that makes a lot of sense." Maybe that's the thing: I hate to lose, so I'm not addicted to gambling. I hate the feeling, so I don't go there. I thought it was an interesting comment. It's kind of morbid and twisted, but the whole rush of putting it on the line and losing is a powerful one, and it keeps them going back. I thought it was kind of an interesting point. My point is that we need to be able to invest in those programs that deal with people individually.

Now Internet betting, Internet poker—listen, I go on pokerstars.com or whatever it is, and I play their funny money thing. It's a kind of diversion. I like going there. I picked up a ticket from the Ontario Lottery corporation, which sells these things by the hundreds. This one is the Texas Hold 'em poker. I like to play hold 'em poker. I think it's a lot of fun. I personally go to those websites and play not for money; I play for the play money. I think most people are responsible when they go to those things. They're not in there betting all kinds of money; they're doing it for play money. I don't think we should be banning that kind of thing. In my view, it's just a bit of entertainment, a little bit of diversion. When I have nothing to do, I go on pokerstars.com, or whatever it's called, and I play a couple of hands of poker, just try my luck against other players from across the world, and we do a bit of chatting at the same time. I certainly don't promote the idea of banning that kind of activity. I'd like to hear the member on that, because as I read his bill, he sees that as a link to getting people into the betting rooms, where they put the actual money. There are a whole bunch of people out there who don't do that, and I'm one of them. I say it quite clearly.

1030

If we're saying that we're going to ban the ability of people to go onto the Internet and play games such as backgammon, chess or hold 'em poker—whatever it might be—because somewhere out there there's backgammon for money, I don't think that's right. People have to be their own liquor control board, as I like to say, and be their own decision-makers when it comes to acting responsibly.

I say to the member that I'm going to support the bill in the sense that I think it needs to get to committee, but I really am leery about this, because it leads us to the false presumption that if we pass this bill, we've dealt with the issue of problem betting. I really don't believe it does. It lulls us into thinking that we've actually found a solution. I think what we need to do as legislators and in society in general is to try to educate people into being responsible when it comes to betting. We need to make sure that we deal with those people effectively, so that they can make some good, solid choices.

The other we've got to do is go to the OLC, the people who run our gaming, and they have to be a big part of the solution as well when it comes to making sure that there are proper ways of finding information when you need it, so that the person who walks into the casino that one day and has just lost another week's paycheque and is walking out can see predominantly that there is somewhere he or she can call for help. If I walk into a casino and lose a whole bunch of money, that's not evident. I don't find that information unless I go searching for it. It's like the alcoholic, right? The alcoholic only quits drinking when he or she decides that it's time to quit drinking. You've got to reinforce the person every now and then by making it very visible where that person can go get help, so that eventually they can make the choice to call and actually do what needs to be done.

Yes, I'm going to vote for your bill, but I want to be on the record and I want to be very clear that I have some deep concerns about what this is actually going to do at the end, because I don't know how you really can enforce this effectively. Second, I have some philosophical problems with where this leads in some cases, because I think people should be making their own choices in some of these matters. More importantly, I think we need to really do public education, in the sense of trying to get people to understand how to become responsible bettors, and also on the whole issue of being able to deal with addictions in a much more real way.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate? The member for Scarborough—Etobicoke Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): Scarborough—you had it right the first time—

The Deputy Speaker: Scarborough Southwest; I was right the first time,

Mr. Berardinetti: —although Etobicoke is a great place as well.

I'm pleased to be able to join the debate here and to have a few minutes to offer some comments. I want to start off by commending the member from Peterborough for bringing forward this bill, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002.

I just wanted to read, for those who are watching or listening to the debate, what he basically is proposing here. It reads here: "No person shall print, publish, distribute, broadcast or telecast an advertisement or representation that includes an Internet gaming business website address unless the person believes in good faith that the Internet gaming business has been licensed or otherwise granted permission to operate in Ontario or Canada by the appropriate authority and is operated in accordance with the applicable laws of Ontario and Canada."

I think what the member here is trying to do is simply to put some regulations in place that would stop people from outside of Canada from trying to influence people within Canada to gamble on the Internet. I think the focus here, more than anything else, is on young people. When you look at young people, they can be more influenced to do certain things, perhaps, than someone who is a little bit older.

I would just give a few examples, in my short time, to point that out. Several years ago, I remember in high school having several friends who smoked cigarettes, and there was nothing wrong with smoking cigarettes. Nowadays, I think the age to smoke is 19. They put that in just a few years ago. I know that the stores ask for photo ID to make sure that if someone is trying to buy cigarettes, they're at least 19 years old. That's new, and that's something good, because that at least keeps some of the younger kids from going into a variety store and just picking up a pack of cigarettes or smokes.

The same with alcohol: I was 18 the year they changed the law to 19. We still have the law on the books that says that you can't buy alcohol unless you're 19 years old, and there's a reason for that. You don't want young

people going into an LCBO or beer stores and buying alcohol.

I think that you need regulations at certain times. You don't want to have too many laws on the books but you need certain laws, especially those that will protect the young and the most vulnerable in our society.

I just wanted to also read into the record the fact that there was a study conducted recently by GamCare, CitizenCard and Children's Charities' Coalition from the UK. It did a study on Internet safety. It tested 37 online gaming sites to see if a minor could set up an account. It found that minors were able to open an account and access gambling systems on 30 of the 37 sites. So a minor can basically get on pretty well almost any gaming site. All you need is a credit card and a laptop computer and you're in business. You can start gambling and spending money.

We all have stories we could tell of siblings or high school friends who did stupid things when they were young, myself included. All of us had experiences in one way or another, whether it be smoking or alcohol or even with gambling, which has become profuse in our society nowadays: the lottery tickets that are available, the amount of gambling that you can do on the Internet, the number of casinos that have opened up in the last 10, 15 years, whether it be Casino Rama, Niagara Falls, Windsor and elsewhere. Those are legal, of course, but they just seem to be proliferating. The bottom line is that these casinos make a profit, and they make a good profit; otherwise they wouldn't be in existence. All one needs to do is look at Las Vegas and the casinos down there and the fact that they wouldn't have the fountains and the other types of buildings unless their casinos made a profit. The people who are running gambling operations know there's a profit to be made in doing this.

What we need to do, and what I commend the member for Peterborough for doing, is to protect those who are most vulnerable: the young, those who may not know better, those who may just want to experiment or who have sudden access to a computer one day, maybe their parents' computer, and there's a credit card lying around and they decide to go on there and just try it.

As a provincial body, as a regulatory body, we have the Ontario Lottery Corporation and other effective authorities—the police authorities—that can effect proper monitoring of these sites, and they need to do so. They need to continue to monitor and check these Internet sites, otherwise people, especially young people, will be able to gamble, potentially gamble and potentially cause hardships for their families and friends.

I support this and I ask that everyone in the House support second reading of this bill here today.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I'm delighted to speak on Bill 60, from my good friend Jeff Leal from Peterborough. I think it shows that he certainly has the interests not just of his community but of all Ontarians at heart.

When we talk about his private member's bill to try to prevent gambling activities on the Internet, we have no

jurisdiction in Ontario. It worries me that with the advent of the Internet, we have communications around the world in an instant second. I guess with good things—and it is a good thing when we're able to access information at a click of a button—there's always a negative, and gambling is certainly a problem that I believe is being aggravated more and more over the Internet.

I must tell you, I'm not a gambler. I think I've been inside a casino a couple of times. I made my donation and left. But what's aggravating is that sometimes when I too am searching for something through the Internet, when I click a button, something pops up, and normally it's two activities. One is for gambling and the other one is for—well, I won't mention what it is. It's something that we're not proud to talk about in this House. I am concerned about that because the more accessible we make something, we're going to use it. This is why, in Ontario, we're proud to have an LCBO that controls the drinking age and the sale of alcohol. By having those controls, someone couldn't just walk into their convenience store and reach into a counter and are able to buy, regardless of age.

1040

We need to do something. How we can do that with today's technology—I kind of question that. I'm not so sure we have all the tools, but I think we need to be ready with legislation in place so that, if those tools become available, we are able to act.

I was reading some reports. For example, one of the problems that arises, even though these people might be of age, is on university and college campuses. When my kids were going to college and university, I was worried about whether I could help them with their tuition and their living expenses. It worries me that today, over and over again, some of the money that either they worked for or that their parents helped them with might be going to gambling through websites on their campuses. As a matter of fact, it even goes a little bit beyond that. I've heard reports that some students at colleges and universities overstretched their credit limit on their credit cards and used all the money they were supposed to use for tuition or food and accommodations, and they then created some criminal activities to try to get some of that money and got themselves into even more trouble. So I guess it's not just the gambling piece itself, but the other things it could generate that might not be appropriate.

I'm not trying to deter legalized gambling, because we in Ontario have embarked on that scenario, and by all circumstances, I think it's working fairly well. There are always things we need to address, and we as a government, and previous governments, have addressed that. But gambling through the Internet is something we have very little control over. The other sad thing is that sometimes, when one of these sites pop up, it's some place in some Third World country, so if something were to go wrong, how would we ever find out? We would have no jurisdiction.

It is a concern, and I congratulate my good friend Jeff Leal from Peterborough for at least having the initiative

to bring this forward so we could have a healthy debate in this House.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): First of all, I also want to commend my good friend the MPP from Peterborough for bringing forth this piece of legislation. Many people don't know that, very early this morning, the member from Peterborough was in Timmins, representing the government yesterday, representing his minister. I think he was up at 4 taking a plane this morning to be here for this debate at 10 o'clock. That's how important it is to him. I commend him for doing that.

I also want to welcome Jane Holmes from the Woodbine Group. As the member said, it's wonderful to see you here today. I know the member from Etobicoke North is so proud of your announcement of a \$1-billion investment in our province from Woodbine. We think that's wonderful, and we wish you well on that and the contribution you're making.

I'm informed by two friends of mine who come from my riding, Catherine Hardeman, who is the executive director of Choices for Change, and Mr. Jeff Wilbee, who is the executive director of Addictions Ontario. They have been able to brief me over the last few years about the dangers of addiction and what is the appropriate government response to make sure that we, as a society, are supporting people who fall into the trap of addiction. One thing we can do is to do what we can in this House, with our limited jurisdiction, to deal with the issue of illegal gambling on the Internet. As the member from Peterborough said, it is, in a sense, from the Criminal Code, a federal matter. But that does not absolve us of our responsibility as legislators to protect our children and those who are prone to fall into that dark place of addiction and the tremendous family, financial and societal costs it inflicts.

What I particularly like about this bill are two things. First, it helps me show, in my own riding of Perth–Middlesex, where we have a vibrant horse racing industry, where we support the horse racing industry, where such a large and vital part of agriculture is centred, that we believe in their industry and don't believe that the money of the horse racing industry should go to anybody other than law-abiding corporate citizens and the individuals in that. It shouldn't be siphoned off to Third World countries.

I want to commend the member, because he was very simple in this bill about how we solve it. What he said is that if you live in this province, if you are going to post on your website any advertising of another website, then you have to know in good faith that that is a site, an operation, that falls within the laws of this country and of this province.

I want to say to those people in Ontario, in this country, who, without good faith, are not doing due diligence when they're posting something on their website, that they are actually in fact perpetrating illegal activity. I think the member is absolutely right that we have to say to those people, shame on you that you are participating

in an illegal activity, helping that forward, snubbing your nose at Canadian law, endangering our children, and robbing this province of the vital contribution that is made to the economy by industries like the horse racing industry, like the gaming industry, which is regulated, as the member for Northumberland said.

If we're going to have this, it needs to be regulated. The law should be supreme in this province. We should say to those people who are assisting those who are offshore and want to steal money out of this province that they should not do that. The test, I think, is a reasonable one: Can you, in good faith, know whether or not that website conforms to our laws in this country and in this province?

I want to say to the member from Peterborough that I think he has this right on, and I think that this is a bill that all members should support. I would be surprised if there are people in this House who would stand up and say that this is not a well-balanced, reasonable piece of legislation to protect our children.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to join in the debate with respect to this bill. The member from Peterborough is a good fellow. Unfortunately, he supports the Peterborough Petes, who are going to get their butts kicked by the Barrie Colts when they come up for the Memorial Cup. I just want to put that on the record. I'm going to be at the game March 16, when the Petes come in to the Barrie Colts. I can tell you, the Petes will be leaving defeated. I digress. Where was I? I was speaking about online gambling. But that's not a friendly wager. We mean business on that one.

The bill doesn't do anything. The bottom line is that the Criminal Code does not allow Internet gaming in this country. It does not allow it under section 207 of the Criminal Code. But there is an exception, and the exception is that provincial governments can get into online gaming if they wish to, but they have chosen not to. The fact of the matter is that the law is that no online gaming is allowed in the country, because the provinces haven't gotten into it and the federal Criminal Code doesn't allow it.

The standard in this bill is good faith. The member's bill states, in terms of the standard, that if the bill is passed, it will "prohibit the advertising of website addresses of Internet gaming businesses unless the person doing the advertising believes in good faith that the Internet gaming business has been properly authorized to operate and is in fact being operated in accordance with Ontario and Canadian law." The fact of the matter is, you can't do it. So what is the standard? Good faith? Basically, "good faith" means you're ignorant of the law. How many times can you be ignorant of the law in terms of putting up an offshore online gaming address or whatever? The bottom line is that what we're trying to get at here is the offshore online gaming sites coming into Ontario. This isn't going to stop it. I can tell you that for a fact, if you're going to have a standard as low as good faith. What does "good faith" mean? It means, "I didn't know the law."

1050

I want to deal with the law a little bit here, because I think it's important that we understand this. The public should know, because if we bring this in we're going to start prosecuting people, innocent Ontarians, who don't know anything about what's going on here. If they give this to their friend and say, "Here's where you can do some online gaming," they're going to be prosecuted by this government.

Part VII of the Canadian Criminal Code makes all activities related to operating or acting in support of a commercial betting enterprise an offence unless it is an enterprise licensed by the provincial government. There is an exception right here: government-operated computer gaming. "Internet gaming which is a lottery scheme operated on or through a computer may only be conducted by a provincial government." That's under section 207 of the Criminal Code. Subsection 207(4) specifically provides that "a provincial government may conduct and manage a lottery scheme on or through a computer but may not license others to do so." Unless Mr. Leal is telling us that the provincial government is going to be getting into online gaming, what is the point of having this particular bill? The province is the only one that can do online gaming and they're not doing it, unless Mr. Cordiano has something up his sleeve in terms of getting into online gaming.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Maybe they're going to. They're using Jeff Leal, maybe.

Mr. Tascona: Your turn is coming up, Mr. O'Toole, with the cellphones, but I appreciate the comment.

I did some research on this. I'm not trying to be critical here; I just want to be fair, because I don't want people being prosecuted in this province who in good faith put something on a website not knowing that you can't do any online gambling in this province.

The code does not explicitly prohibit Internet gambling. However, it is the view of the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario that Internet gambling is caught by the general prohibitions prescribed by section 206 of the Criminal Code. Moreover, for the purposes of section 207, an authorized lottery scheme, other than one run by the province, does not include a scheme that is operated on or through a computer. Whether the province could legally conduct and manage an Internet gaming scheme is, according to the commission, open to question. In any event, the commission says it has not issued any licences to operate an Internet lottery scheme in Ontario. It also believes that no other province has issued such a licence.

To date, no Internet gambling cases have been prosecuted under part VII of the Criminal Code, and I believe there's a good reason for that. From what I understand, the CFL was involved in this to some extent, and no action was taken against them with respect to the type of operation they were involved in.

"The expansion of online gambling in Canada poses new challenges to law enforcement. Many of organized crime's criminal activities such as drug trafficking, money laundering and enterprise crime offences are

financed by illegal gaming profits. Even if authorities decide to act, however, enforcing vague rules on the World Wide Web, which moves across borders faster than any roulette wheel can spin, may prove impossible. Canada's federal and provincial laws are inadequate to deal with the onslaught of virtual gaming. Provincial governments are limited in their ability to prosecute foreign-based casino operators operating in cyberspace. Since the existing legal framework is inadequate to deal with a global, intangible entity, new legal, technological, and political solutions will have to be crafted in order to protect Canadians from the substantial externalities posed by online gambling."

That was an article I found in this particular issue, *Internet Gaming: A Look at Online Gambling in Canada*, by Michael D. Lipton, QC. That was back in June 2002.

What has happened in terms of this particular type of industry—because online gaming is big business. I don't doubt for a minute that offshore gambling is affecting the provincial gaming in this province, but you're not going to stop it by putting a standard in the Consumer Protection Act saying, "If in good faith you put an address that will allow somebody to know where to do some gambling offshore, you're going to be prosecuted." How are you ever going to prosecute that? What are you trying to accomplish?

What they've done in the United Kingdom is they have said, "We recognize this is a problem. We also recognize that we're going to have to get involved because we're losing money." What they've done is legalized online gambling in the United Kingdom. They've set up a commission. They've set up regulatory officers to make sure that online gambling is done within the United Kingdom and done in accordance with their laws. They've made sure they're the ones that are doing this, because it obviously is big business—people are interested in doing this.

I'm not criticizing the member from Peterborough for bringing this forth. It's an issue he has to bring forth as a private member because the minister of government agencies, for whom I'm the critic, obviously doesn't think it's important enough to bring forth as a government bill, so he's got a private member's bill going through. There should be some discussion on this, because there can be fraud against people who get involved in this because it's being operated offshore.

What is the solution? This is an industry that I think is in excess of \$13 billion, from the last count in 2004, and it is growing exponentially because people are interested in it. My good friend from Timmins-James Bay has brought forth the type of gambling where you can go to your convenience store and do as much gambling as you want all day and blow your mind out. The other thing is that you can go up to the casino or you can go to the harness racing track and do that also. But there's another element out there that people find popular because of computers and the Internet, and it's out there.

I don't think this is the way to go about it, in terms of saying, "OK, we're going to deal with online gambling

by creating an offence," when the province has to make a decision whether they are or are not going to get into this business. They have to make that decision, and it's up to this provincial government to make that decision. If they're serious about dealing with fraud, if they're serious about dealing with losing revenue, they should make a decision whether they want to get into online gaming or not.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Leal, you have up to two minutes to respond.

Mr. Leal: I really want to thank the members from Haliburton-Victoria-Brock, Timmins-James Bay, Scarborough Southwest, Northumberland, Perth-Middlesex, and the very fine lawyer who represents the riding of Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

The intent here is to lift the veil on this issue, an opportunity to commence some discussion. Indeed, I think it's relevant that the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, the Honourable David Caplan, has certainly expressed some concern about this particular issue, and I have had discussions with the Minister of Government Services, Gerry Phillips, about this matter.

One of the things that certainly concerns me is our youth, and I think a number of members touched on that today. As we broaden access, the temptation to move to these Internet sites becomes enormous, and we know the outcomes that could happen. There are a number of articles—I only have two minutes—and they certainly talk about the proliferation of problem gamblers in an age segment between 18 and 25.

By capturing these dollars that are now escaping the formal gaming system we have here in Ontario, those dollars, as the member for Timmins-James Bay quite correctly identified—the need for programs to address problem gamblers and the need to embark on an advertising program to make people more aware of the extreme consequences that can result from gambling. I think that's an important issue.

Perhaps, when we get approval, we can move this bill on to the justice committee and have representatives from the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. and others start the debate on what I think is a very important issue.

1100

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CELLULAR PHONES), 2006

LOI DE 2006

MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (TÉLÉPHONES CELLULAIRES)

The Clerk-at-the-Table (Ms. Lisa Freedman): Bill 68, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while a person is driving on a highway / *Projet de loi 68, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour interdire l'utilisation de téléphones et d'autres équipements pendant qu'une personne conduit sur une voie publique.* Mr. O'Toole.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): I think I'll stand up here and ad lib for a minute or two until we find Mr. O'Toole. Does anybody know any good stories we could tell?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: It will be recognized later—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker: I had to hold them off for you.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I apologize to the House. Thank you very much.

I move second reading of Bill 68, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while a person is driving on a highway.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 68. Pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. O'Toole: I apologize to the House. I was actually on my cellphone, but I wasn't driving—not to make light of this.

It's an important opportunity to put on the record an issue of public policy discussion that I think has engaged people not just of my riding of Durham but across Ontario and indeed across Canada. I want to thank the media. I've done, I believe, about 30 interviews with the media—the press and radio, as well as television—in pretty well all the major centres in Ontario, on the CBC, as well as in BC, the Atlantic provinces and Newfoundland and Labrador in the past couple of weeks, since this bill has received so much attention.

I guess you'd have to ask yourself, why has it received a lot of attention? Bill 68 is a very small bill. It was first introduced in a different format in the year 2000. It was debated, voted on and passed. It was not unanimous; there were a couple of members at the time who didn't support it. It was then referred, I believe, to the estimates committee, and it died on the order paper of that committee. It never received stakeholder input or comments or amendments, but it did receive a lot of comment from the academic community as well as the policing or enforcement community and others.

I've had all kinds of discussions, most recently this week, with a professor from York University, Professor Wiesenthal, as well as Staff Sergeant Cam Woolley and Peter Barnes from the wireless association, looking at the whole issue of driver distraction and telematics in cars—GPS systems, on-board navigational systems and the emerging distracters in the driver's face, such as billboards that are really big televisions that are distracting drivers as they drive down the Gardiner or other major expressways. That's the future. If you want to look at where it's come from since I started five years ago to where it is today—there's satellite radio in the car, 300-plus channels. You'd almost have to step aside just to tune in the stations. There are not enough buttons on there—

Interruption.

Mr. O'Toole: That is a set-up; it's not a prop. It shows how disruptive it is. That was a set-up; I have to say that. That is a really good demonstration of when

you're driving and your cellphone rings. You know just exactly how captivating that ring is. You feel compelled to respond; you honestly do. That's a clear demonstration. You're not supposed to use props in the Legislature, but that's exactly what it does. When you're driving—

The Deputy Speaker: We don't allow planned demonstrations either.

Mr. O'Toole: Thank you, Speaker, for that indulgence.

The timing was off there, but I did want to make the point that this is one of the major issues with the phone itself and the ringing device. It seems to command us to respond, and that's really important when you look at driver distraction. There are two parts to the issue of the cellphone. One part is the physical interruption of text messaging or dialling a number or all of those little physical distracters. That's one part.

The other one is the mental capturing or the distraction, that you are somehow enslaved by the phone, that you're listening, paying attention and your mind actually becomes divided. Your purpose when you're driving a car, of course, your first and most important responsibility, is to operate the motor vehicle safely.

What my bill tries to do is find the balance between being in the driver's face, so to speak, or in the citizen's face, by saying, "You can't do this and you can't do that," and to allow hands-free. That's really the point here. It isn't a ban on cellphones. I want to make that very clear; it's to allow hands-free.

I've spoken with the industry people, the manufacturers of the wireless devices, and they can quite easily adapt these things; in fact, the new hands-free devices are little ear buds. With the new ones, there's no wire. It's a wireless attachment that allows you to hear and have the other end plugged into your phone, but there's no wire. It's a wireless earpiece that allows you to hear without the potential of the little extension wire getting in the way.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): It's called Bluetooth technology.

Mr. O'Toole: It's called Bluetooth technology, exactly. That's being used by the high-end vehicles, this Bluetooth technology, which is wireless. The other one is OnStar, where it's interconnected with the radio so that your speakers actually become a receiver-transmitter.

When you look even further in this whole telematics thing, there are the GPS systems of today which can track the car. They're quite engaging technologies. It will actually tell you verbally, "Turn left," "Turn right," "You've got five miles to go to the hotel." It will tell you everything. It will talk you through a trip from here to whatever your destination is.

It is even more profound than that. If you wind the clock ahead a couple of years, that car could be driven, or stolen in fact, and if you had a car anti-theft system, they could disable the car. If it was in Florida and it was stolen from you, they could disable the car through satellite technology and GPS. They could actually send you

messages on the warranty on the vehicle or that the pressure is low on one of your tires. This is what's coming in the future.

It can provide all sorts of customized radio, not just satellite radio. Say you like classical music in the morning and western music in the evening. You can buy non-commercial radio, and it's provided as a service. So the technology of the future isn't just the cellphone debate.

The bill does four things. First of all, it modifies driver education so that all new drivers would be informed that these technologies, cellphones included, can provide a serious distraction, and educate them and test them on their knowledge of what are their primary responsibilities when operating a motor vehicle safely.

The second thing, on any vehicle accident there would be a requirement by the police to complete whether or not technology was a contributing factor to the incident—as they would with whether alcohol was involved or seat belts were involved. Now they would comment, so we would gather reliable statistics.

The third thing it would do is permit, by regulation, the Minister of Transportation, or the government for that matter, to add or delete items that could be exempted or included. It could regulate the fines or points that could be set as a punitive measure to discourage people from using technologies. That can be done in regulation.

The fourth thing is that G1, or new, inexperienced drivers, would be prohibited for a period of time from actually using technologies while driving—as they do today. There are so many passengers, they're not allowed to travel at night and travel on certain types of roads.

So it's pretty unintrusive, to the extent that all it does, really, is say that if you're going to use technology, it must be hands-free, and with that, I would also encourage that it should be voice-activated, because the phone that I actually have in my vehicle has all of the features I've described. I can just say, "Call home," and it dials my home, or "Call office," and it dials my office automatically. You can voice-program it to do lots of different things.

It's important to recognize that driver distraction was the subject of a conference just held in Toronto last year. I want to put on the record that our current Minister of Transportation, Mr. Takhar—he's still the minister, as I know; we won't vote on that until this afternoon—said:

"In 2002, 7.9% of all drivers involved in collisions in Ontario were not paying proper attention to the road. In 2003, that rose to 8.1%.

"Those numbers are gathered from police data. But they may not tell the whole story.

"In the United States, it's estimated that driver distraction may be a contributing cause in between 20% and 30% of all collisions. It may cause as many as 10,000 deaths in the US each year—and cost nearly \$40 billion."

1110

That was a quote from Harinder Takhar, Minister of Transportation, on Monday, October 3, 2005, in his remarks to the international conference on driver distraction. So the minister realizes it. What I am dis-

appointed in is the leadership of Dalton McGuinty, who trivialized it. When asked by the media, he said it's just not on. I'm asking the government to have a full and comprehensive debate on the research that has been done to date.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate.

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): It's a pleasure for me to speak on the bill that the member from Durham has introduced. I want to say that I certainly thank him for bringing a major and important discussion to the table on such an important issue. Road safety is a very important issue to all members of the House. I do have some major reservations, but at the same time I would like to urge everyone who drives to pay attention to the road and to the task of driving. There are hands-free devices available for use in our vehicles, and people should use them.

There are many distractions out there. The University of North Carolina Highway Research Center recently conducted a study showing that cellphones are not at the top of the list of distractions to drivers. In fact, their study ranked cellphones number eight on the list of distractions to drivers. Eating, drinking, billboards, adjusting the radio, and even other occupants in the vehicle all run higher on the list than cellphones. Some 45 countries worldwide have now implemented restrictions or bans on cellphone use while driving. The evidence shows no significant long-lasting effects in jurisdictions where such restrictions have been imposed. Reductions in cellphone use while driving following legislation being imposed have only had short-term effects. It has been reported that in New York state, merely three months after the implementation of a cellphone ban, the usage rate had returned to pre-ban levels—no change.

Not only will this bill be ineffective, but it also could potentially put the people of Ontario at risk. There are over six million 911 calls made from mobile phones annually. I myself use a hands-free device in my car. When I'm stuck somewhere in traffic, it is important for me to have the ability to call my wife and my children to let them know. What about when you are running late for a meeting? You have a meeting to attend and you're worried about it. Certainly, one cannot argue that if you have the opportunity to call and let the person know that you're running late, you are certainly driving more responsibly than if you are not able to make that call. In such an instance, not having a cellphone to notify the affected party could impair your driving and put other drivers on the road at higher risk.

Like I said before, road safety is a very important issue, and our government is focused on it. The Minister of Transportation took part in the first-ever International Conference on Distracted Driving last October. Our government and the industry are working towards greater public awareness and education. I trust the police to enforce existing laws against careless driving. I trust the Legislature, such as ourselves, to continue to be open to any and all suggestions which may enhance our quality of life and increase the safety of our streets. I trust the people of Ontario to use their judgment and engage in lawful and mindful behaviour both on and off the road.

There is no question that we must discuss this very important topic, but in making changes, we have to make sure that the changes are for the better. I still say that it's important that we are able to communicate when possible, and using telephones that we don't have to hold certainly will not cause any major distraction to the driver. Therefore, I have a major concern.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): From what I can see, documented need for this legislation and support certainly appears to be widespread. We've been hearing about this issue for a number of years. I would like to cut to the chase and encourage members to support this legislation and vote for it.

We're debating Bill 68 with respect to cellphones. I see it as yet another opportunity to make highways safer for all of us. If this Highway Traffic Act amendment helps out, then I advocate that we move forward.

For example—and this was alluded to previously—I am constantly in my truck or in my car—or on my tractor, for that matter—doing business. I am fully aware of the trials and tribulations of literally living in one's vehicle. Obviously, handheld cellphones and driving are not a very good mix. You throw in radio, having breakfast in your vehicle, having your tea or your tea biscuit, having dinner or supper—depending on whether you're rural or urban, you would have different terms for “dinner” and “supper,” I suppose—you add in all of these other issues, and it really gives new meaning to that expression “driven to distraction.”

I would like to read a quote. “In 2002, 7.9% of all drivers involved in collisions in Ontario were not paying proper attention to the road.” Who said that? Harinder Takhar, as of today still Minister of Transportation. I understand he is still at his post. These were remarks made last October to the International Conference on Distracted Driving.

So documentation on the dangers of distraction is widespread.

The member for Durham alluded to the work of Dr. Redelmeier. It's titled—I say it's titled, not “entitled”; I'm opposed to the culture of entitlement, so when I see a title in a document, I refer to it as being “titled,” not “entitled”—the Association Between Cellular-Telephone Calls and Motor Vehicle Collisions. The member may have referred to this. It was a report based on a study of close to 7,000 drivers—actually, 6,999 drivers—who had cellphones and were involved in motor vehicle collisions. These were collisions that resulted in substantial property damage but no personal injury. The report came to the conclusion that “The use of cellular telephones in motor vehicles is associated with a quadrupling of the risk of a collision during the brief period of the call. Decisions about regulation of such telephones, however, need to take into account the benefits of the technology and the role of individual responsibility,” which is something we believe in very strongly on this side of the House.

How about this one, from the Canadian Medical Association? This was in their journal in 2001: “Drivers who

fail to exercise good judgment must be regulated to do so, for cellphones are just the beginning. Computers, fax machines and DVD screens are also starting to clamour for dashboard space. We need to regulate the use of cellphones and other driver-distracting devices. This is a no-brainer.” That's from the CMA Journal 2001.

In my previous employment, I did a great deal of work against drinking and driving, commencing back in 1984. I think we all fully realize the value of programs like the RIDE program, the roadside RIDE stop checks. RIDE stands for Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere. It's based on law and it combines not only enforcement but also information and education. Oftentimes you get a keychain, a button or a brochure when you're pulled over. We have to augment this kind of legislation with appropriate enforcement, obviously—and that will be difficult—but also information and education programs, the health promotion programs, if you will.

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So we have before us a bill that amends the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of a cellphone, car phone, pager, personal data assistant, portable computer, fax machine or other equipment prescribed by regulations made under the act while a person is driving a motor vehicle. The legislation includes exceptions for emergencies—for example, cases where a driver who is not a novice driver as defined in the regulation on drivers' licences uses the equipment entirely through a hands-free feature—the member opposite made mention of the value of hands-free technology—and other cases prescribed by regulation under the act.

If this legislation does receive the support that it deserves, I am hopeful that with a better-informed and more fully educated public, combined with just that modicum of enforcement, we would go a long way to eliminating some future tragedies.

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins-James Bay): I swear to God, the member from Durham must have been conspiring with my staff or my wife in drafting this bill, because I've got to admit I've had problems over the years with that particular issue. It's something that I work hard not to do, because I do realize that it's dangerous. I've got to say, there's been—

Mr. O'Toole: That's when you're flying—

Mr. Bisson: Well, no. Flying is a much different thing, as you well know. When you're up at altitude and you're cruising, you're often reading maps, you're looking at your GPS, because you don't necessarily have to keep your eye out the dash as long as you're watching your instruments. You can't do that in a car.

I've got to say, it is an issue in our society, and I know a number of my staff who might be watching right now are probably yelling at the TV saying, “Go, John, go. Ban this guy; he's dangerous.” There is actually an issue with that, because I think a number of us are guilty. I'm going to try to be up front about it. I'm not going to pretend that I'm a perfect human being. I'm like everybody else. I do have my foibles. Staff, it's hard for you guys to understand that I would have anything wrong in my character.

Dear, I know you're watching and you do think I'm perfect, but I want to admit I will humble myself today and say that certainly I am not.

It is an issue, and I've got to say it's an interesting thing that we go through as human beings when it comes to realizing sometimes that we're doing something wrong. I think most people don't recognize it's wrong. I guess that's the first thing that I want to say. We think that we're invincible, that we're perfect drivers, that we're always paying attention, that we can multi-task. We pride ourselves in this society on being able to multi-task a number of things at the same time. A lot of us, I think, are in a situation where we may not be as good at multi-tasking as we think we are. I just want to talk about a couple of things that have happened to me, and I think I've raised them in this House before.

One of the reasons that I really have tried to curb this habit of being on a cellphone while driving is that, really, the act of talking, not just the act of holding onto the phone, is very distracting. That's where I have a bit of an issue with, well, it's okay to use the phone that's in the car if it's a speakerphone. It's the act of that conversation that makes you not think about what you're doing when you're driving.

I don't know what it is, and I never did understand it because I can be sitting in the vehicle—for example, on Saturday or Sunday, Sylvain Lacroix, one of our staff people, and I drove up to Smooth Rock to the carnival; we yakked along the way, talked about things from work and whatever—and there's something about having somebody in the car when you talk; it doesn't distract you. I don't understand that. If I've got a speakerphone and I'm talking to somebody on the cellphone—if I had one, because sometimes I use my ear phone—you're really not paying attention in the same way that you do if you're talking to a person. I don't know why that is. I really don't understand it, because I've caught myself, I don't know how many times, putting the ear phone on, driving down Highway 11 from Hearst or Kap or wherever it might be, and all of a sudden, I'm past the point on the highway that I thought I'd be at. All of a sudden, I go, "Well, how did I get here?" I didn't pass where I was going because, obviously, I think I would have paid enough attention to figure out, but I'm a lot further along down the road. There's something about talking on a cellphone, either by way of a speakerphone or by way of holding it to your ear that, for some reason, disconnects you from the task of driving your vehicle.

I want to say to the member: I take a little bit of a different point of view that speakerphones are all right. I think it is the act of talking on the phone. Maybe because the person's not in the car with you, subconsciously your mind drifts to whatever issue you're talking about and you're not paying as much attention.

I remember one particular occasion, what really, to me, was the moment where I went like this on the issue. I was the worst culprit when it comes to speaking on cellphones while holding them up to my ear. My staff would yell and scream at me, as my wife would, when I'd be

driving my Ford F-150 responding to my BlackBerry messages. It really is a dangerous thing. You shouldn't do that. I'm really trying to do a better job of it, staff. It's still safe. You can still drive with me. I admit I've got a problem, and I'm trying to overcome it. Dale, it's okay: you can get back in the car. You don't have to get out the door just yet.

I remember one particular incident. I left my home and my cellphone went off. I live on Middleton Avenue. It's a matter of backing up my truck, going halfway down the block. As I turned the corner to get onto Cameron—there's a stop sign two streets down on Commercial, I grabbed my cellphone because somebody called, right? You take it out of the holster and grab it up. I was stopped at the stop sign, and somebody walked out in front of the car and I didn't even see them. For whatever reason, I hung up my phone, and I was just about to get going and almost ran the person over. Literally, if I had not hung up that phone, I probably would have stepped on the gas. The only thing that saved that poor individual was that the phone conversation was a short one and I hung up. All of a sudden, I realized where I was in my driving. My point is, for me, it was a very scary experience because it told me I can't do this safely. I can't be concentrating on a phone call on my cellphone and, at the same time, driving my vehicle in a way that's safe.

I recognize there's a problem. I think we all need to have some self-responsibility. Staff, that means you can yell at me when I do it next time. I'll try to be much better next time.

But the point is that we need to internalize the responsibility. We need to be responsible ourselves. We shouldn't have a law to tell us to do this. It's the same as anything else you are doing: Whatever it is, you should do it in a safe manner.

In regard to the whole issue of distraction while driving, the problem I've got with this bill is the following: It only deals with one of the distractions. There are a whole host of other issues that distract drivers. For example, the other day I was watching America's Funniest Home Videos or something. Like one of those shows—

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): You're not admitting this?

Mr. Bisson: Well, yes. When you've got nothing to do sometimes, that's what you do.

I was watching the show a couple of weeks ago. They had set up a camera along the side of a road somewhere to show the problem with people doing things when they're driving. There was a guy driving down the street—not shaving with an electric shaver—who had shaving cream on his face and he was going through with his Bic shaver, and you're going to tell me that's not dangerous? Or how many times have you seen this: You're driving down the highway and you've got somebody in the mirror adjusting their lipstick or doing whatever it is they do. You're going to tell me that's not dangerous? It's probably more dangerous than talking on a cellphone.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: Aha, we have some people who have done it. I see them in this Legislature. We're not going to name names or point fingers, but that is an issue as well.

People eating in the car: How many times have I seen people pull out of McDonald's, A&W, or whatever it might be, all of a sudden and not realize they're moving into some quick traffic? The guy's holding onto his quarter-pounder or Big Mac trying to drive out on to the road. I've seen that a number of times. Quite frankly, I'm a bit cautious going by Tim Hortons or one of those things. I always pay attention because there have been a couple of times where people were still trying to put their coffee away after they'd gone through the drive-through window and they were not really paying attention to what they're doing.

Spilling your coffee—how many times has that happened? I don't drink coffee in my vehicle. When I do now, I get half a cup, because when you go into Timmy's, they fill up your cup with boiling hot coffee. You grab your coffee, you're finally on the highway and, bang, you get yourself and you're all over the place.

There are all kinds of distractions while we drive, and this bill doesn't deal with them. Now, does it mean we should vote against this bill? Some of us are thinking, well, maybe we should because it doesn't deal with everything. I want to ask the member a question, and I think the answer is what will make up my mind. Is he prepared to amend his bill in such a way that it doesn't become just a ban on cellphones? We need to think about legislation that deals with the issue of being distracted while driving.

There are two things. First of all, the police already have the authority to deal with this by way of what's already in the Highway Traffic Act. If you are driving dangerously, there are parts of the Highway Traffic Act that give police officers the opportunity to not only charge you but charge you six demerit points on your licence, and then your insurance company's going to come back after you with higher premiums, which is a big discouragement from doing it. If you're driving down the highway and drinking a cup of coffee or talking on your cellphone, you can be charged by the police already by way of existing infractions within the Highway Traffic Act.

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I understand why the member brings this forward—it's a real issue—but I don't think it deals with the issue. The real issue is people being distracted while they drive. I say we need to deal with that particular issue, and the question I want answered by the member is, is he prepared, if the bill should pass second reading and ever get time in committee, which is very difficult in this place—it's true. It's very hard for members to get their bills into committee. It's a real issue, and we need to deal with it one day.

My point is to look at the issue and amend the bill so that it isn't concentrated just around cellphones, so that it deals with the issue of people being distracted while

driving a vehicle. We need, I would argue—it's probably not a bad thing—to give police the powers they need to charge somebody if they're distracted while driving in some way that's very specific to being distracted—not necessarily dangerous driving, because the issue can be that I'm drinking my coffee, I'm on my cellphone, I'm doing my hair and looking in the mirror, and I still have control of my vehicle. The police officer can't charge me in that case. I haven't broken a law because I've still got my car under control. I'm not speeding or weaving down the road or driving recklessly, but I'm doing something that potentially could bring me there.

So I think we want to look at an amendment to the bill to say, let's deal with all of those issues so that, in the end, the police officer is able to charge somebody if they see that, and give them some discretion, because I don't think you can write a bill that is black and white. You've got to give police officers the ability to make judgment calls, because there's a bit of difference between somebody drinking a cup of coffee and somebody doing their hair in the rear-view mirror. You know what I mean? We need a little bit of common sense in this whole approach.

I would ask the member to respond to that, and I would be prepared to vote for this bill and allow it to get second reading if we can look at that general issue.

The other thing I want to get into quickly is the issue I touched on for a second: How do we get the bills out of committee here? This gives me an opportunity to say this. It's really too bad. Some of the best legislation that comes out of this Legislature actually comes by way of private members' hour. I think this is a really useful time that this Legislature uses to give members, individually, the opportunity to bring bills forward—members of the government, like members of the opposition. We all understand who's in control of the legislative agenda here: the cabinet. They're the ones who control it. Even government backbenchers can't control the outcome of their private member's bill any better than a member of the opposition. We know. We've been on both sides of the House, so we know what we talk about.

We really need to have a discussion about how we're able to more effectively deal with private members' bills so that members, first of all, have an opportunity to do that more frequently, because part of the problem is—and this is for people watching at home—it's a lottery. At the beginning of every Parliament or when everybody's had a chance to introduce a private member's bill, we do a lottery of 103 members, less cabinet and the Speaker, to decide who's going to have their private member's bill when. If you're unlucky and you're always number 73, 74 or 75, which happened to me in one of the Harris Parliaments—I forget which one it was—I virtually went the whole Parliament without a private member's bill because I was always number 70-something.

It's a real downer because the member who happens to be unlucky—by the way, I got lucky this day. I got 25 bucks on this one. I bought it as a prop and I won 25 bucks. Maybe this is my lucky day.

My point is that I was unlucky, and that happens to other members. They don't get their bills forward. I think

there are a couple of issues we need to look at. One is giving members the ability not only to introduce bills but to get time for debate. Maybe we need to expand the amount of time the House uses for debate of private members' bills. The other thing is that we need to look at our committee structure, so that if a bill is passed, the member has an opportunity to get their bill into committee and at least do the tertiary work at committee, of having at least a day where a member can have people come before the committee to speak to his or her bill so that we can go to the next step.

There needs to be some process to allow increased ability to introduce the bill, and a process to allow the bill to at least get into committee and have some meaningful discussion and work at the committee level. We need some non-partisan mechanism to allow those bills to move forward in some way, because too often—and I know; I'm the whip of the New Democrats, so I understand how this works—we end up at the end of the spring or fall session of the Parliament and it's the big trade-off. If, for example, your government disagrees with a bill that we've identified as the one we want to put forward as a private member's bill to be passed and dealt with at the end of the session, and you're not willing to give it to us, we'll block everybody else's, and you guys do the same to us. We end up with these big horse trades in regard to private members' bills. I think that's rather unfortunate.

The other thing—and I want to end on this point—is that if we allowed more opportunity for members to introduce private members' bills and actually saw those bills become law, I think we would end up with probably much more substantive and much more well-thought-through bills, because then it becomes not an exercise of trying to figure out, "Which bill is going to get me all the media attention I can get for the next little while in my local media?" but you can actually start dealing with some issues, because all of us come here with passion about whatever it might be.

We're here because we come out of the not-for-profit sector, or we were in education, or we were in municipal politics or the labour movement, whatever it might be. We have issues that we want to deal with. I think it would give members an opportunity to say, "Let's seek each other out, across the floor, those who are interested in particular issues, so that we can work together to advance some of these issues." For example, if there are people who are interested in aviation—there may be three or four of us in here interested in aviation—we can collaborate in some way across the floor to help each other get an issue forward. I think it would be a way of doing not only us but the population some good.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): I'm happy to join this debate this morning. I think the private member's bill has raised many issues that are important to us all, and road safety certainly has to be one of them. There was another fatality on Highway 7 this morning in Ottawa. We had five fatalities east of the city of Ottawa at Vars two weeks ago during that snowstorm. We know

how important road safety is. Anything we can do to improve that situation is very important. The roads in Ontario are the safest in North America—that's by independent evaluation—so we just want to make them safer. We have a lot of work to do yet.

The first lessons drivers learn, of course, are in driver's ed. For this reason, banning cellphones on Ontario highways—I think, if we just look at that issue, we would not be addressing the overall issue of distractions and safety while driving. Driving while distracted, whether it's from interruptions from inside or outside the car, is extremely dangerous and can result in severe consequences, as we all know.

Under the Highway Traffic Act, as has been mentioned by other speakers this morning, there is a \$1,000 fine and six demerit points, possible jail time and a driver's licence suspension for careless driving. Under the Criminal Code, anyone convicted of dangerous driving faces up to a \$2,000 fine and jail terms up to five years. So there certainly is legislation that is out there and is used from time to time.

Under the act, careless or distracted driving can mean anything from distractions like eating or drinking or talking to passengers in your car to operating a cellphone or similar device. There are many distractions we all have. Creating legislation to officially ban cellphones will not take care of the wider issues of distracted driving. More than that has to be done. Jurisdictions that have banned the use of cellphones while driving have found that initially you do get a reduction, but after time, the use comes back to pre-ban levels, so the whole enforcement is probably a problem.

Bill 68 does not adequately address the problem. In clause 78.1(4)(b) the bill states: "Nothing in subsection (2) prevents a person who is not a novice driver from.... (b) using equipment listed in that subsection, if the person uses a hands-free feature to operate the equipment...." According to nine separate research studies, hands-free phones can also have an adverse effect on driver performance.

As my colleague from Timmins-James Bay, Gilles Bisson, said earlier—he made a confession that he's not perfect. I think we all look at ourselves when this debate is going on, at all the instances where we have put ourselves in dangerous situations because we weren't paying attention.

Mr. Bisson: Not you, too?

Mr. McNeely: And he included me, that I wasn't perfect as well. Thank you.

This brings us back to distracted driving. If one can become distracted by a mere conversation, then banning a cellphone will not deal with the issue. The Ministry of Transportation has been working on this issue and has put provisions in place that will allow all young drivers to learn the rules of the road and to become accustomed to operating a vehicle without distractions. That was shown to us: that the likelihood of a new driver having an accident was four times as bad when he had three or four passengers in the car with him. Under the new rules,

starting in September 2005, all teenage G2 drivers must limit the number of passengers under age 20 that they carry. That's just for the late night. It could have been a wider ban; it was discussed that way. But certainly, the more kids in the car with the young driver, the higher the accidents. This was showing up in the insurance rates; this was showing up in the statistics. It was up to four times as high. So those distractions, whether they're from the people in your car, cellphones that are manual, or other conversations in the car, all contribute to this.

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According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Crashworthiness data system, 29.4% of accidents are caused by distractions from a person outside the vehicle. I'm not going to get into that, that rubbernecking and the other distractions that you start staring at when going by, but that's 29.4% of the accidents. That's the distraction outside of the vehicle.

Some 11.4% of the distractions leading to accidents are caused by adjusting the radio or changing the CD, and 10.9% of the distractions are caused by another passenger in the vehicle. Only a small percentage—one report says 1.5%—of accidents are caused by using or dialling a cellphone. So we have to look at those other distractions.

What do these numbers tell us, then? That this legislation does not address the wider problem. It's part of the problem; it doesn't address the major part of the problem. We need to work at educating the public, and that includes ourselves. I have taken a lot of direction from my wife on that as well, because we do allow ourselves to be distracted too easily. She's a focused driver, and I think that's what we have to be. We have one job to do when we're behind the wheel: to focus on driving safely and following the rules. We have to make sure that's the direction we're going in.

The Ottawa Police Service agrees—and we've spoken to them—that a holistic look at traffic safety is required instead of a mere piecemeal approach. Banning cellphones does not address the deeper problem. What is required is public education. Ontario introduced the first comprehensive graduated licensing system in North America in 1994. This system encourages novice drivers to enrol in an approved driver education course to ensure that they learn the rules of the road through formal instruction. In the five years after graduated licences were implemented, the average fatal and injury collision rate for drivers aged 16 to 19 dropped by 37%, so that was very successful.

We're proud of what Ontario has done. We're proud of the direction that we're going. More education is needed. So I will not be supporting this bill, although it has raised a great discussion.

Mr. Yakabuski: It is indeed my pleasure as well to join the discussion this morning on my colleague's bill, Bill 68.

I had a meeting with the CAA people this morning, and to no surprise, they indicated that one of the prime concerns they have is driver distraction. It's not just

cellphones; it is driver distraction, and there are a multitude of things that cause driver distraction. Cellphones are one of the causes.

I recall a few months ago where this person was charged for driving while watching a movie on a laptop computer in the car. Now, that's driver distraction to the nth degree, but those are the kinds of possibilities that exist out there with technology today with regard to distraction. You've seen these vehicles now today—and I think it's a real problem, quite frankly—with these GPS monitor systems built into the dashboard that light up as bright as a big fluorescent fixture. It cannot but help distract the attention of the driver. When people are driving, they're punching in coordinates or trying to find where they are going. I have always thought it was a pretty good idea to figure out where you were going before you got into the vehicle, and if you have a problem, you pull over and you try to ascertain where you are relative to your destination.

One thing that was raised by the member from Ottawa-Orléans is that police already have the ability to lay charges if someone is unduly distracted—they can charge you with careless driving—but it is a very subjective thing. The police would have to make a call: One person having a cellphone in their hand might constitute to them a careless driving situation, and for another person it might not. I'm sure the police would be more comfortable if they knew that if someone has a cellphone in their hand, they are in violation of a statute.

Having something in your hand is an issue, because when we're taught to drive, we're taught to drive 10 and two. You're supposed to have two hands on the wheel. I know that most of us don't. I don't—I don't even pretend to—but I have the option and the ability to put that second hand on the wheel immediately or very quickly if necessary. When you're holding a cellphone or any kind of hand-held technological device, the tendency is to not let go of that device to free up your hand to get on to the wheel as quickly as possible. So there is a specific distraction that comes with hanging onto a cellphone. I do have a hands-free ability with my cellphone, which I use. There's some concern that people whose cars are their offices—

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: I'm being heckled by my own members. It is touching.

Salespeople and people like that tend to use their cars as their offices, but do you know what? They have the technology now, and I'm sure everyone out there who uses a cellphone a lot is taking advantage of the opportunity to use that hands-free technology, which would put them outside of the scope of this legislation.

There is no question—and I don't have all of the time; I'm sharing this with others. I know people personally who have indicated to me that they have had accidents, albeit minor ones—fender-benders and rear-enders—particularly in the urban areas, when they have been engaged in conversation on the cellphone. So there is no question that that does distract them differently. The

member for Timmins–James Bay is absolutely correct that a conversation with another human being in the car does not have the same effect on you that a cellphone conversation does.

Mr. Bisson: I don't know why.

Mr. Yakubuski: I'm not sure why it is either, but there must be something in the way the brain focuses on an object, that you can't make contact with your eyes or body language or some other way. So there is no question that having that conversation with a person on the other side of a technological instrument does change the dynamics somewhat.

I want to see where this is going. I want to see where a committee takes it. But in general, we have a responsibility to take the necessary steps where we can to improve highway safety in this province. There is much to be gained. There is money to be saved. There are lives to be saved. There is money to be saved in our health care system and lives to be saved if we take the necessary steps in all ways to make our highways safer.

Ms. Caroline Di Cocco (Sarnia–Lambton): I have to say that I'm pleased that this debate allows us to have a broader discussion, and that discussion is about distraction. Having said that, I want to point out that just looking at cellphones in isolation is for me an issue. The Canadian Automobile Association believes that we have to have greater public awareness about the overall issue of driver distraction. The Canada Safety Council doesn't believe there is enough evidence there, and also that more public awareness, education and strict enforcement of the existing laws that we have in Ontario are what we should be doing.

Right now, collision report form improvements are being looked at. The police have indicated a desire to see collision reporting forms modified to include information about driver distraction, and that information includes cellphone use. I think that brings into this whole discussion the fact that cellphone use, under a number of studies that have been done, is listed eighth on the list of causes of driver distraction. The current measures we have for careless driving, by the way—Ontario has one of the toughest rules of the road with regard to careless driving. Police can charge drivers with careless driving if they're not paying full attention to the driving task. A driver convicted of careless driving will receive six demerit points and fines up to \$1,000 or a jail term of six months. So we have the laws on the books that deal with distraction, and if we can get the collision report forms to include the different aspects of distraction—and I know that the member from Timmins–James Bay certainly discussed a number of other distractions. All of us here have been part and parcel of—let's put it this way: being guilty of being distracted.

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The other issue I have with this is that the results have shown that the distraction, whether it's caused by handling a cellphone or having a hands-free, is still there; you're still being distracted. So I think what we have to do is take a look at the notion of distraction and come up

with an approach that makes us all more cognitive of what we're doing behind the wheel. That's what better safety is, I think, at the end of the day.

I know that Mr. O'Toole has brought this bill forward a number of times and I applaud him, because it provides us this opportunity to have a frank discussion. But I want to just reiterate that there are current measures that exist to punish drivers for careless driving. If we add to that collision report form improvements, which is what the police are looking to do, then we can monitor all of those different areas of distraction that are creating or causing accidents, because the forms don't specifically have all of these different aspects of distraction.

The laws are there on the books. We have really tough rules. The one thing about being specific to just cellphones is that that's also very hard to enforce. But if we change our forms and use the laws that are on our books, I believe we'll have safer roads.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I'm very pleased to be able to make a few comments this morning on my colleague from Durham's private member's bill. I know this bill has come forward in the past and we've had some debate on it here in the House on a number of occasions. Certainly it is a controversial bill; I don't think there's any question about it. We've all seen people driving down the highways in our province, and we've all seen cases where they were probably not very attentive to the road conditions because of conversations going on on their cellphones. I don't think there's any question about that. What the member here is trying to say is that maybe we should be drawing some special attention to that.

That's one of the reasons we hear a lot of people today. I had people in this morning from the CAA who talked about the distractions in driving. They are doing a major study, and I believe that later on in the year there will be a report coming back from the Canadian Automobile Association on major distractions in driving. In the end, it costs all of us more money on our insurance, and in some cases costs people their lives as well.

What I'd like to see happen here—and I hope that all members of the House would take this opportunity to support the bill—is that it actually go to a committee, like I think a lot of private members' bills in this House need to go to committee and be discussed. It will bring an opportunity for a lot of different stakeholders, not just politicians but police services, people who maybe have lost loved ones in accidents, maybe the Canadian Trucking Association. All of these kinds of folks may want to come in and make comment. Maybe they're completely opposed to the bill; maybe they're in favour of the bill. I think it would be an opportunity for something which is fairly controversial, and I think it would be important to bring it forward.

I would compliment the member for bringing the bill forward again. But I'm going to tell you, to be honest with everyone in this House, I use a cellphone a lot, and I'm someone who would be impacted by that if many laws were changed to eliminate cellphones. But of

course, if we're allowed to have the hands-free stay, that's not a problem, in my opinion, at all. I know the Premier has been on record saying that you can't legislate everything. However, this could be a public safety bill. It could be something that affects lives. I think we owe Mr. O'Toole—he spent a lot of time in this House in the last six or seven years debating and trying to promote this piece of legislation, and I would be very, very supportive of seeing it go to the next stage, having committee hearings and having a lot of our stakeholders come in to debate it.

As well, I just want to say at this time that I think a lot of private members' bills in this House are good bills. There are many times that, yes, we vote for them but they never get called forward. I think of Michael Gravelle's bill on the insulin pump, for one. I think of the PSA testing bill. That's another one I'd like to see brought forward in this House. Quite often people overlook the fact that during private members' hours on Thursday mornings a lot of neat and important legislation is actually introduced here and passed on, but in a lot of cases we don't see that legislation being brought forward by the government.

So I'd encourage the government to bring forward this bill. I would encourage all members of the House to support Mr. O'Toole on second reading of this bill. I look forward to committee hearings at some point where we can actually have the stakeholders in to debate it as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. O'Toole, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. O'Toole: I do want to go on the record as thanking the members for Thornhill, Ottawa–Orléans, Timmins–James Bay, Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Simcoe North and Sarnia–Lambton for their comments.

I'm quite aware that the Liberals have basically whipped the vote on private members. This is what I'm hearing. I understand that, because Dalton's first response was that he didn't think we needed the bill. But I listened to all the experts as well as the people of Ontario, and I can tell you, without being solicited in the political sense, 75% of the people are opposed to not moving forward with this, 75% of the people say we've got to do something on the issue of driver distraction.

By passing this bill, I'm asking the Minister of Transportation and, indeed, the Premier to move forward, to have consultations on the broad issue of driver distraction. Yes, there are other distracters, and there are emerging new distracters all the time. This is a more precise tool to help the police intervene and disrupt the person's chronic behaviour, perhaps, and perhaps save a life by saying, "Hey, you shouldn't be driving on icy roads holding a cellphone." Careless driving today is pretty onerous. It's six points and it could cost as much as \$1,000 by the time you get out of court, and your insurance for your family.

I'm going to refer to the Redelmeier study. This is from the Canadian Medical Association Journal. It's not political. This is from back in 2001, where I started here.

Donald Redelmeier and Robert Tibshirani reported that, "The risk of having a collision when using a cellphone was four times higher than when the cellphone was not being used." There's the medical evidence. "Drivers who fail to exercise good judgment must be regulated to do so, for cellphones are just the beginning. Computers, fax machines and DVD," and onboard navigation "screens are also starting to clamour for dashboard space. We need to regulate the use of" technology and "cellphones and other distracting devices. This is a no-brainer."

I'd say that this is the right thing. I'm calling on you for your support.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

CONSUMER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT (INTERNET GAMING ADVERTISING), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA PROTECTION DU CONSOMMATEUR

(PUBLICITÉ DES JEUX SUR INTERNET)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall first deal with ballot item number 21, standing in the name of Mr. Leal.

Mr. Leal has moved second reading of Bill 60, An Act to amend the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 to regulate the promotion and advertising of Internet gaming in Ontario.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Leal, this bill is referred to the committee of the whole, unless—

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Mr. Speaker, could I ask that this bill be referred to the standing committee on justice policy?

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Leal has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on justice policy. Agreed? Agreed.

HIGHWAY TRAFFIC AMENDMENT ACT (CELLULAR PHONES), 2006

LOI DE 2006

MODIFIANT LE CODE DE LA ROUTE (TÉLÉPHONES CELLULAIRES)

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We shall now deal with ballot item number 22, standing in the name of Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. O'Toole has moved second reading of Bill 68, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to prohibit the use of phones and other equipment while a person is driving on a highway. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1200 to 1205.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour, please stand.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne
Barrett, Toby
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Brownell, Jim
Chudleigh, Ted
Craitor, Kim

Dunlop, Garfield
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Hoy, Pat
Lalonde, Jean-Marc
Leal, Jeff
O'Toole, John
Ruprecht, Tony

Scott, Laurie
Tascona, Joseph N.
Wilkinson, John
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Yakabuski, John

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please stand.

Nays

Broten, Laurel C.
Bryant, Michael
Delaney, Bob
Di Cocco, Caroline
Duguid, Brad

Kwinter, Monte
Levac, Dave
McNeely, Phil
Mossop, Jennifer F.
Qaadri, Shafiq

Racco, Mario G.
Smitherman, George
Wong, Tony C.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 19; the nays are 13.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer this to the standing committee on estimates.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. O'Toole has asked that the bill be referred to the standing committee on estimates. Agreed? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having been dealt with, I do now leave the chair. The House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1208 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): Today, I again draw the attention of the Minister of Health to the issue of age-related macular degeneration.

A constituent of mine, Agnes Lorbetskie of Renfrew, has been diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration and has received one treatment for it. For this treatment, she was forced to pay \$2,000 out of her own pocket. The treatment for her condition is Visudyne laser therapy, which is not covered under the provincial health insurance plan. Mrs. Lorbetskie will require several more treatments over the next few years. I ask the Minister of Health why this treatment is covered under the plans of British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick and the Yukon, but not in Ontario.

The minister waxed on the other day in debate about how he was determined to make the best health care system in Canada even better. What the McGuinty

government has done is instituted a health care tax while reducing services to the people.

Age-related macular degeneration is a growing concern among seniors in this province. The loss of one's independence as a result of blindness will place a much greater burden on our health care system than the cost of this treatment. Low-income seniors like Mrs. Lorbetskie simply cannot absorb these costs on their own.

I have written the minister on this subject in the past and call on him today to stand in support of seniors all across this province who are suffering under the financial stress of treating this debilitating disease on their own. I will also be presenting a petition on this subject. Minister of Health, I hope that you're listening, and ask that you stand up for seniors now.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton–Kent–Middlesex): On Tuesday of this week, the Friends of Four Counties Hospital held their second annual town hall meeting to discuss their commitment to their local hospital and their dedication to maintaining essential health care services in their rural community of Newbury. As a result of this meeting, five recommendations were brought forward, including the implementation of a rural hospital funding formula, the provision of sufficient funding to keep in-patient beds in rural hospitals, and the recognition in provincial health care strategies of the value of accessible health care to a rural community's economic viability.

I am happy to have such a dedicated group within Lambton–Kent–Middlesex that is willing to work with our government to provide the best access to quality health care for our citizens, and I am pleased that the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care publicly stated his commitment to the future of Four Counties Hospital when I originally brought this situation to his attention in December 2003. Minister Smitherman has long said that the small hospitals of this province enjoy a bright future in the McGuinty government, and I know that Four Counties hospital will remain an important partner in the delivery of health care services in Newbury and in the Middlesex Hospital Alliance.

CARDIAC CARE

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): The residents in my community are very concerned that the future of Dr. Schaman's cardiac rehabilitation clinic in Breslau is in doubt. Provincial funding for this clinic was first provided in 2001, but they have now been told by Ministry of Health staff that funding is only guaranteed until June 30 of this year.

This popular clinic was originally funded to improve access to cardiac rehabilitation services and prevent heart disease, and to do so in an innovative community-based setting. Since 1978, the clinic has seen 35,000 patients who attribute their good health to their participation in this program.

Barb White of Cambridge has been going to the clinic since 2002 and says in her letter to Minister Smitherman, "Dr. Schaman is keeping people healthy and fit, and we desperately need his services."

Evelyn Playford, who has been going to the clinic since 2001, has written to Minister Smitherman to say, "It is incomprehensible to me that the ministry charged with protecting and improving the health of Ontarians would withdraw support from a health promotion program with a proven track record of success." She states that she has been able to control her heart condition without surgery and other costly procedures.

Today I am joined by my colleague from Waterloo—Wellington, Ted Arnott, in urging Health Minister Smitherman to listen to the pleas of these patients and to continue to provide public funding to this very accessible and popular clinic.

HATE CRIMES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I'm proud to say that my city of Hamilton is contributing \$10,000 toward the reconstruction of the Hindu Samaj Temple. In the words of Hamilton city councillor Tom Jackson, we are "trying to right a wrong."

It is with great regret that I must report that the Premier of Ontario has refused my request that he do his part to right a serious wrong. The Hindu Samaj Temple was destroyed by arson in a racially motivated destruction spawned by the events of September 11, 2001. Ontario was not immune to the racist backlash, and I hoped that the McGuinty Liberals would do their utmost to help the community.

A place of worship and a community centre representing the investment and hard work of Hamilton's sizable South Asian community was torched. The community had to again raise money, secure loans and start over for a second time. History will record this event as Ontario's worst hate crime. It was an attack on South Asians on Ontario soil, and the McGuinty government has been largely silent.

On October 24, I wrote to the Premier and urged his government to answer the community's calls for financial assistance to restore the temple. In a letter to me dated December 6, the Premier came up empty. He offered a lot of talk about violence and racism, about taking it seriously, but the bottom line is that it was just talk. Frankly, I find this response insulting. The role of the provincial government is to respond to crises, to show leadership in helping to erase the stain of that terrible event.

Hindu Samaj is more than a temple. It's a hub. It's a cultural attraction and a center for the elimination of racism.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): Two weeks ago, when a devastating mudslide buried a village in the Philippines, our government immediately offered their

assistance. The Honourable Mike Colle, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, announced that the Ontario government will donate \$200,000 on behalf of the people of Ontario to help the victims. We will continue to work closely with the Consul General of the Philippines, Alejandro Mosquera, to continue to assist the victims, their families and their community, and to ensure that the funding we have provided will be used in the most appropriate manner.

Thornhill has a very active and vibrant Filipino community. In fact, when I was a councillor in the city of Vaughan, we signed a friendship agreement with Baguio City in the Philippines to encourage cultural, social and educational exchanges and to promote new business opportunities. Vaughan's sister city program was the first international partnership agreement ever signed between cities in the Philippines and Canada.

Ontario is a richly diverse province, defined by the contributions made by all members of our communities from all over the world. On behalf of myself and the people of Ontario, our deepest sympathies go out to the victims of this tragedy and, as promised, we will continue to assist in any way we can. This is a tragedy that has affected many people who live not only in Thornhill but in Ontario. I certainly think the minister has done the right thing by giving some assistance to this community.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): Let me say this: It is a sad and telling sign when your friends don't come to your rescue. The Integrity Commissioner has described Minister Takhar as having displayed "negligence," as being "egregiously reckless." For the first time, a minister found in violation of the act is staying on in cabinet.

Friends coming to the rescue: Only six members of the entire Liberal caucus spoke in favour of the minister or the Premier's decision to keep him in cabinet. Only one out of 10 members of the Liberal caucus are behind the Premier's decision and that of the Minister of Transportation. Two members, the House leader and Brampton Centre, rose in debate and spoke about other issues, but made no mention of the Minister of Transportation or the Premier's decision. Cabinet ministers: Of those who work with him around the table at cabinet, one single cabinet minister rose to his defence. That cabinet minister too, Ms. Pupatello, got him in more trouble by saying that he practically lived at the Chalmers Group, while the minister said he never worked there. And those who are putting their toes in federal leadership waters—Minister Kennedy, Minister Duncan—put the pedal to the metal to get as far away from the transportation minister as possible.

It's a sad thing when there are no friends behind the minister. It's time to dump that guy from cabinet.

1340

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I rise in the House today because we need to talk about the importance of

passing Bill 210. There is no doubt that children in need of protection in this province will be much better off if Bill 210 becomes law.

It is especially important for Ontario's aboriginal communities. The fact is that aboriginal children and youth are disproportionately represented in our child care protection system. Under the current system, aboriginal children who come into the care of a children's aid society are often placed in non-aboriginal foster care, which can lead to these children losing important ties with their culture and community.

The minister, ministry staff and myself met with representatives of the community and listened to their concerns. Our government worked with the community to develop specific amendments to the bill that would address the concerns of the aboriginal community. The end result was 20 amendments to Bill 210 that address aboriginal concerns; amendments that will help more vulnerable aboriginal children stay on reserve and in their communities, maintaining important cultural and community connections.

I am deeply disappointed that John Tory and the Conservatives have tried to thwart the passage of this bill for political reasons. Their antics are not hurting the government; they are hurting Ontario's aboriginal children, who need our support.

Chief Keith Knott of Curve Lake and Chief Greg Cowie of Hiawatha in my riding will certainly take note of where this Reform Party—no, Progressive Conservative Party—stands on this bill.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): This government introduced Bill 210 because it is committed to making the child protection system more responsive to the needs of children. We are also committed to doing everything possible to avoid imposing unnecessary trauma and hardship on families with children in the system.

In Ontario today, there is no province-wide standard as to how complaints against children's aid societies are handled. We must bring greater consistency, expediency and fairness to the review of children's aid society decisions. We need a process that responds to the urgent and sensitive nature of child protection. We need a process that is timely and results in binding decisions.

Bill 210 will give families access to just such a process. Under the proposed changes, families could bring complaints forward to a neutral third party, the Child and Family Services Review Board. Ontario's Ombudsman will play a key role in this new process by holding the system to the highest standards of objectivity and integrity.

I am proud of this government's commitment to increasing accountability in the child protection system. I urge the official opposition to make the interests of Ontario's children and families a priority. Show your support for Bill 210 and help us to create a stronger protection system that will be of certain benefit to future generations of children and families in this province.

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): I rise today to share the progress being made through the Child

and Family Services Statute Law Amendment Act. I was one of the members of the standing committee on social policy who heard the delegations on this legislation. I'm really proud to have helped with this legislation and guided it through committee. It's a strong bill that has been made stronger by amendments made since second reading, five of which came from the third party.

The ultimate aim of Bill 210 is to help Ontario's crown wards find permanent, loving homes. All too often, these children have spent their early years being bounced between foster homes. We know that children are more likely to thrive as part of a constant, nurturing family.

The current system is too rigid. This legislation will make adoption more flexible for children and less complex for adoptive parents. We must make rules that fit the children rather than making the children fit the rules.

I know that no one in this House wants to see Ontario's crown wards kept from nurturing, permanent homes, but that is exactly the effect of the political games that John Tory and the Conservative Party are playing with Bill 210. By playing politics and delaying this bill, they are holding hostage some of the most vulnerable children in Ontario.

I'd like to ask all members to think about that as third reading of Bill 210 continues. The children most in need of our protection will undoubtedly be better off if this bill becomes law in Ontario. I think we can all agree on that, and the members can stop playing politics.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

BUSINESS CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT ACT (VETERINARY PROFESSIONAL CORPORATIONS), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LES SOCIÉTÉS PAR ACTIONS (SOCIÉTÉS PROFESSIONNELLES DE VÉTÉRINAIRES)

Mr. Hudak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act with respect to veterinary professional corporations / Projet de loi 76, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés par actions en ce qui concerne les sociétés professionnelles de vétérinaires.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): Members will remember that government Bill 197, introduced by then Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, extended a tax benefit to health care professionals. There has been a government commitment to extend that to doctors and dentists to encourage them to stay in the province. Other regulated

health professionals are eligible. I encourage the government to extend that benefit to those health professionals.

This bill, if passed, will level the playing field so that whether it's a doctor, a dentist, a massage therapist, a radiation technologist or a veterinarian, all would be eligible for that tax benefit.

SAFEGUARD OUR SENIORS ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA PROTECTION DES PERSONNES ÂGÉES

Ms. Martel moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 77, An Act to protect persons in care from abuse /
Projet de loi 77, Loi visant à protéger les personnes
recevant des soins contre les mauvais traitements.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): The bill places a duty on operators of health facilities to protect patients from abuse, and a duty on persons aware of senior abuse, or the likelihood of it, to report this to the Minister of Health.

The minister is authorized to appoint an investigator to enter a health facility to undertake a full investigation of the reported abuse. The minister can issue any direction necessary to the operator to protect seniors from abuse. Criminal wrongdoing can be referred to the police, and proof of professional misconduct can be referred to the body or person who authorizes, certifies or licenses that person to carry on his or her work.

The bill provides for whistle-blower protection for employees, protection for seniors and their families when a report of abuse is made, and fines for those who fail to report or obstruct investigations.

The bill is modelled after Manitoba's Protection for Persons in Care Act. This is the second time it has been introduced by New Democrats.

EDUCATION STATUTE LAW

AMENDMENT ACT

(STUDENT PERFORMANCE), 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'ÉDUCATION (RENDEMENT DES ÉLÈVES)

Mr. Kennedy moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to amend the Education Act, the Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996 and certain other statutes relating to education / Projet de loi 78, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'éducation, la Loi de 1996 sur l'Ordre des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'Ontario et certaines autres lois se rapportant à l'éducation.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Minister, do you have a brief statement?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I will make a statement during ministerial statements.

1350

TRILLIUM GIFT OF LIFE NETWORK STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LE RÉSEAU TRILLIUM POUR LE DON DE VIE

Mr. Lalonde moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act, the Health Insurance Act and the Highway Traffic Act / Projet de loi 79, Loi modifiant la Loi sur le Réseau Trillium pour le don de vie, la Loi sur l'assurance-santé et le Code de la route.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): The purpose of this bill is to amend the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act to require that a consent form be distributed with every application for or renewal of a person's health card and driver's licence. This form permits a person to consent to the use of his or her organs after death for the purpose of an organ transplant. If the person provides consent, the information will be included on the person's health card or driver's licence. Furthermore, the Trillium Gift of Life Network would then start and maintain a registry of information and consent.

Simply increasing the number of people who agree to organ donation and sign donor cards for their wallets does not go far enough. The key to this bill is the registry. It will connect patients who need a transplant with the consenting donors through a registry run by the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

We know that every three days a person dies waiting for an organ. This bill will ensure that the registry is available to all hospitals and doctors in the province to ensure organ donors can be quickly and easily identified.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

EDUCATION

ÉDUCATION

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I rise in the House today to introduce some very important legislation for the direction of education in Ontario. If passed, this legislation would be a tremendous boost for improved student performance in this province. Today, the McGuinty government is for the first time setting provincial outcomes to maximize our education initiatives and remove barriers to greater student achievement.

Pour la première fois aujourd'hui, le gouvernement McGuinty établit des résultats provinciaux afin d'optimiser nos initiatives en matière d'éducation et de supprimer les obstacles à la réussite scolaire.

The previous one-size-fits-all approach to education adopted by the previous government has proven ineffective. This bill is a significant tune-up that will modernize Ontario education as a condition for the success of students.

The student performance bill contains several measures, limited in themselves, but substantive in terms of the Education Act and the Ontario College of Teachers Act. They provide the legal support necessary to enable the three most important objectives that we have in terms of education in this province: improving student performance, establishing a partnership within education based on respect, and openness to the public.

To support the government's ability to build confidence in public education, the ministry has identified areas of key provincial interests, such as lower class size, fiscal responsibility, improvements in literacy and numeracy, and the safety of schools, just to name some examples. The legislation, if passed, would clarify ministry and board responsibility related to those goals, particularly those concerning student performance.

The new authority would enable the ministry to set provincial outcomes and require boards to meet those outcomes. And very importantly, because we believe that we must work as partners in education, specific outcomes would be set in regulation only after significant consultation between the ministry, school boards and our other partners in education.

This legislation would help to define ministry expectations clearly. This would, in turn, allow school boards to have the flexibility they need in order to successfully implement provincial initiatives.

Le gouvernement sait que pour améliorer le rendement des élèves, il doit épauler les personnes qui assurent l'enseignement chaque jour, y compris le personnel enseignant.

Subject to the approval of the Legislature, the requirement for new teacher candidates to pass the qualifying test as a condition of certification would be revoked. In its place, we are introducing a positive second step for professional development for beginning teachers, giving them instead valuable in-class support during their challenging first year of practice. What it means for parents and for students is that there would be a complement to their formal one year of pre-service university training of a second year of support.

The new teacher induction program would address new teacher retention issues—we lost as many as one in three new teachers under the previous government—and their development by giving them valuable mentoring from experienced teachers, together with on-the-job training and professional development. The teacher performance appraisal system for new teachers would also be modified. If passed, the successful completion of the teacher induction program would require two satisfactory performance appraisals. The result will be better-prepared and more confident teachers.

The previous government didn't support teacher training because it reduced the number of professional

activity days from nine to four. Across the country, the amount of time available for those purposes is nine days. If we are to support our students, we must provide professional development for our teachers. We need to provide them with more opportunities for shared problem-solving and give them access to new, cutting-edge teaching techniques in order to improve student achievement.

Legislation currently allows for up to four professional activity days. Those provisions will be repealed, and we will instead have the authority to add additional ministry-directed professional development days to support the government's education initiatives. It is our intention to have two additional days should the legislation pass, because better-trained teachers mean better-prepared teachers. Part of the students' ability to focus is the establishment of an era of peace and stability.

After years of labour strife under the previous government, the McGuinty government is proud to have played a role in a provincial dialogue that helped teacher federations and school boards reach first-ever four-year agreements. If passed, this bill would allow the extension of existing labour agreements from two to four years.

Et, en partie, la capacité des élèves à se concentrer sur leur éducation crée un climat de paix et de stabilité.

Après des années de conflits de travail sous le précédent gouvernement, le gouvernement McGuinty est fier d'avoir joué un rôle dans un dialogue provincial qui a aidé les fédérations d'enseignantes et d'enseignants et les conseils scolaires à conclure les premières conventions collectives de quatre ans.

Two more initiatives that are key to improve student performance are our primary class size initiative and access to education. If passed, this bill would repeal sections of the Education Act, establishing minimum class sizes and establishing the regulations that support the phasing in and implementation of the government's primary class size initiative.

This legislation, if passed, would also give more students access to the Ontario education advantage by enabling students to be taught for the first time by e-learning instructional methods.

All of the amendments being proposed hinge on our ability to create and sustain lasting partnerships in education based on respect.

Toutes les modifications proposées s'articulent autour de notre capacité de nouer et de maintenir des partenariats durables fondés sur le respect.

This legislation, if passed, would respect school board trustees for the important work they do on behalf of students by giving them realistic support, removing penalties in the act related to trustee compliance, and strengthening and clarifying their role in stewarding education. It would respect student trustees by empowering and recognizing student trustees through new scholarships, recorded votes, procedural rights and increased resources. It would respect teachers through a revitalized Ontario College of Teachers as a true professional body which has the confidence of its members and public, and

is depoliticized by having a majority of classroom teachers on its council to carry out its mandate.

Finally, if passed, this legislation would open up education to the public. By giving the minister the ability to direct school boards to offer school facilities for community use at a nominal fee, this would offset costs associated with the community use of schools initiative. It would also ensure a greater public reporting of board and provincial initiatives so that there is greater accountability and public transparency, because access to education, opening up our schools, will foster better community relations for the future success of our students.

This government, the McGuinty government, is taking responsibility for education in Ontario and giving our partners in education the respect they deserve. I hope this bill will find the support of this Legislature because, ultimately, it represents what we all desire to accomplish in education: openness, partnership based on respect, and improved student performance.

Monsieur le Président, notre gouvernement assume pleinement la responsabilité de l'éducation en Ontario et accorde à ses partenaires éducatifs le respect qu'ils méritent.

1400

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I rise to tell you about the next step in our government's plan to transform and strengthen community-based services for adults with a developmental disability.

Our plan is guided by three principles: fairness, accessibility and sustainability. First, Ontario needs a system of supports that is fair, so that each person receives supports based on his or her needs. Second, families need to know where and how to find services, and those services need to be accessible more consistently and closer to home. Finally, our plan centres around building for the future, creating a sustainable system that is not only strong and innovative, but also affordable.

A key part of our transformation plan is a new specialized services strategy, a comprehensive \$41-million strategy to strengthen community-based supports for adults who need more than just assistance with daily living; they also need the support of behaviour therapists, social workers, nurses and psychologists to help deal with mental health issues or challenging behaviours.

This is a long-term investment in supporting adults with a developmental disability who have some of the highest care needs.

A key part of our strategy is the new community networks of specialized care, community partnerships that will coordinate services for individuals who have very high support needs. Ontario has a wealth of expertise with specialized services, but what was needed was better coordination, helping health care profes-

sionals, case managers, specialized treatment providers and community organizations to work together better and connect families to specialized services in the communities in which they live.

The networks will bring together professionals from a wide range of disciplines to provide clinical care, comprehensive assessments and case management for their clients—real wraparound service. They will strengthen the entire specialized care community by leading research and teaching in our developmental services sector, sharing their knowledge with professionals and families alike.

I'm proud to say that the community networks of specialized care are the first of their kind in this sector, and we're proud of that. They'll be collaborative systems, professionals working together to put Ontario at the leading edge of services, leadership and expertise that will give families better access to specialized service closer to home.

The four community networks of specialized care will reach out to serve the entire province and will be led by proven leaders in Ontario's community-based developmental services sector, leaders that have been selected by their peers to help Ontario stay at the cutting edge of developmental services.

This morning, at Surrey Place, I was pleased to announce the leadership of Ontario's community networks of specialized care. The southern Ontario network, including Hamilton, Niagara and southwestern Ontario, will be co-led by Bethesda and Regional Support Associates; in central Ontario, network leadership will come from Surrey Place, Community Living Huronia's Pineview site and Guelph's Community Mental Health Clinic; in eastern Ontario, Ongwanada and Prescott-Russell Services to Children and Adults will be the network co-leads; and in northern Ontario, Algonquin Child and Family Services will be the lead agency.

Congratulations to all of these fine community agencies for being selected by their peers to undertake this important and exciting initiative.

We know there's tremendous demand for such services right now in communities across the province. Almost every day families tell us they want to give input into the transformation of Ontario's developmental services sector. Well, let me tell you, they want the same things I spoke about earlier: fairness, so that every family member can get the support they need, when they need it; easy access to services, a system that isn't hard to understand and services that aren't hard to find; and services that will grow along with their family member. We know needs change over time.

These are some of the themes that my parliamentary assistant, Ernie Parsons, heard in meetings with families and caregivers last year. He has prepared an excellent summary of the strengths and needs that should be considered as we transform services in this sector, and I'm pleased to table his report today. In fact, this report, which we've dubbed the Parsons report, is now available online with our ministry. I congratulate my parliamentary

assistant, Ernie Parsons, for tremendous work on behalf of families right across the province. Thank you, Ernie.

In talking with families about the future, he also heard about the great work that continues to grow in our communities, great work on the part of strong, community-based agencies that have caring, dedicated staff who are more committed than ever to helping individuals maximize their opportunities in communities across the province. In fact, through the hard work of ministry staff, families and community-based service providers, we've already helped 80 people successfully move out of our facilities and into new homes in the community. Families of those former residents continue to tell us how happy they are with the increased opportunities and excellent supports available to their family members.

In the coming years, we're going to have hundreds more people returning to our communities, and we will have the services in place to support them. For those who have specialized care needs, our new community networks of specialized care will be there to support them and their families, not in an institution far away, but close to home in their communities. The networks will help us to build a strong foundation of community-based services that will help make Ontario's communities stronger and more inclusive for generations to come.

OLYMPIC ATHLETES ATHLÈTES OLYMPIQUES

Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): I want to take a moment to commend the efforts of the 196 Canadian athletes who represented us so proudly at the winter Olympics in Torino, Italy. They are excellent role models for our children and an inspiration for us all. Canada finished third overall, winning an incredible 24 medals.

I'm proud to note that several of the medals were awarded to the 39 athletes from Ontario, including members of the women's hockey team, who faced every other team to capture the gold medal undefeated. Our Canadian team included 10 athletes from Ontario: Meghan Agosta of Ruthven, Gillian Apps of Unionville, Cassie Campbell of Brampton, Gillian Ferrari of Thornhill, Jayna Hefford of Kingston, Becky Kellar of Hagersville, Cherie Piper of Scarborough, Cheryl Pounder of Mississauga, Vicky Sunohara of Scarborough, and Katie Weatherston of Thunder Bay. I want to personally congratulate the amazing efforts of team captain Cassie Campbell and the nine other women of her team who are from Ontario, and I want to highlight the talent of Katie Weatherston from Thunder Bay. Katie represented Ontario on the women's soccer team at the Canada Games in 2001, where she helped to win the team gold.

Ses efforts soutenus et sa motivation ont bien servi notre équipe nationale de hockey. Katie nous a, encore une fois, bien représentés en aidant Équipe Canada à remporter l'or.

I want to congratulate Kristina Groves of Ottawa and Christine Nesbitt of London. Together they won silver in the pursuit long track speed skating. Kristina Groves also won silver in the 1,500-metre speed skating long track, and Amanda Overland of Kitchener won silver in the 3,000-metre relay speed skating short track. Jeffrey Buttle of Sudbury was ranked in sixth place after his short program in men's figure skating but then dazzled the judges with his freestyle program, capturing the bronze medal.

Le niveau d'excellence des athlètes ontariens aux Jeux d'hiver est vraiment inégalé. Ils comptent parmi les meilleurs athlètes du monde.

One of the priorities of our ministry is to increase support to our high-performance athletes. In fact, this is one of the important components of the McGuinty government's Active 2010 strategy for sport and physical activity in Ontario. We want to build a healthier, stronger Ontario to give all Ontarians a chance to become more active and to achieve excellence, whether recreationally or competitively. In the early and mid-1990s, provincial government support for Ontario high-performance athletes was cut dramatically. This resulted in a dramatic decline in the number of athletes from Ontario representing Team Canada.

Avec les Jeux Olympiques de 2010 à Vancouver-Whistler, qui se profilent à l'horizon, nous devons redonner la priorité à l'aide aux athlètes amateurs. C'est avec fierté que je peux affirmer que depuis notre arrivée au pouvoir il y a deux ans, nous avons réalisé de grands progrès en ce sens.

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My ministry is working to strengthen and increase the pool of high-performance athletes in Ontario. We're supporting amateur sport through a number of funding programs and services. This year, we allocated \$15.2 million for amateur sport, an increase of almost \$5 million over last year and an 83% increase in funding since 2002-03.

After years of neglect, this investment sends a clear signal to athletes that we are back in the business of supporting them. The new investments include a \$6.1-million bilateral Sport for More program, signed by our government and the federal government, to increase participation in sports among under-represented groups. That includes children and youth from low-income families, ethnic minorities and aboriginals.

Additionally, the Quest for Gold lottery will provide an estimated \$2.5 million towards our high-performance athletes by the end of this fiscal year, March 31, with additional funding being provided in 2006-07. Seventy per cent of Quest for Gold funding will go directly to athletes, 20% to enhance coaching, and 10% to increase competitive opportunities, all of which will help our athletes to achieve their highest potential at national and international competitions.

Je me réjouis à l'idée d'assister aux Jeux d'hiver de l'Ontario la semaine prochaine, et je suis convaincu que ceux-ci seront couronnés de succès.

I look forward to going to Collingwood for the opening ceremonies of the Ontario Winter Games. I'll have the privilege of addressing a group of more than 3,000 of our amateur athletes, their coaches and parents, and numerous volunteers.

As part of the Ministry of Health Promotion's support for the Ontario Winter Games, the town of Collingwood has received \$400,000 to be the host city. I want to thank the volunteers, coaches, officials, parents and family members for all of their support.

The summer and winter games are the province's largest multi-sport events and they are a launching pad for future Olympians. Recent Olympic silver medallist Amanda Overland competed in the Ontario Winter Games in Peterborough in 1998. Her success will be an inspiration to this year's young athletes and is proof that these events, like the Ontario games, allow athletes to hone their skills for the national and international level. Our high-performance athletes play a critical role in our pursuit of a healthier Ontario.

I wish our Paralympians the very best as they begin competing next Friday, and our—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Response.

EDUCATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): In response to the Minister of Education's bill, I believe this minister has forgotten what it means to be accountable to parents. He clearly does not understand the concept of self-regulation in the public interest.

Here is the legacy of a soon-to-depart education minister: Make promises to retool the rural and northern school funding formula, but don't deliver on it for almost a year and a half. Say you won't allow schools to close, but stand by while schools such as Ross Mineview, Laurentian and others in places like Thunder Bay, Port Hope, Horton, Deep River and Oxford county close. Say you're going to make class sizes smaller, but until today the Education Act remains the same as it was almost three years ago in that regard. Get rid of calculus from the curriculum, but tell parents you're preparing their children for the high-tech jobs of the future, then backload the review until after the next election. Dumb down the curriculum even more. In three years, this minister has brought forward the lightest legislative load of any education minister in recent history, while he travels the province on the taxpayers' dime, drumming up support for his federal leadership.

School boards are telling him they can't make ends meet because he hasn't given them the money to pay for the new teachers' contracts that he foisted upon them. And what about the stability commission you said was in place in November of last year and that you've been promising school boards weekly? It still is not in place, leaving school boards and principals in confusion. School boards have been telling him for two years now that the busing costs are killing them, and he has done nothing about that either.

Here he is, back from his leadership tour, and he looks back on his legislative legacy. He doesn't have one. So what does he do? What's his solution? He brings in an omnibus bill and lets the next minister carry the can.

Here's what you said about omnibus legislation in the past. On November 21, 2002, you said: "We have a group of people over there afraid to govern, afraid to talk about their initiatives. They want to bundle them in a big pile in an omnibus bill like this, and they are afraid to have open debate and discuss."

So which is it, Minister? Are you in such a rush to leave this place that you have to leave behind an omnibus bill for all of us to try to sort through because you are afraid to have open debate and discuss this bill properly? Are you trying to hide the fact that this bill is going to cost millions of dollars, or billions of dollars, as you have said they cost in the past?

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I want to comment on the minister's announcement on developmental services. It's very clear that the minister didn't bring the kind of news that Community Living Ontario has been seeking from this government. Let's put in context the fact that her government found enough money to pay LCBO workers a four-year deal at 12%, and yet the very people, the front-line staff members in this province who are providing developmental services directly at a community level are getting, at best, a 1% increase and the abandonment by this government of pay equity supports. That is shameful for a minister who stood in this House yesterday talking about women's rights days and so on and so forth, and yet this sector is disproportionately staffed by young women.

You promised to increase the number of community placements to correspond with your accelerated plan for deinstitutionalization. What you have done is ghettoize a whole group of Ontarians with disabilities who do not have access to those placements in their community because of the acceleration of deinstitutionalization.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): That's not true.

Mr. Jackson: The minister knows it to be true. She's not even funding at the same level that the previous government provided under the leadership of John Baird, and she knows it. This is why today's announcement doesn't even enclose a third-party endorsement from the Ontario association for community living. They know this is money that will roll out over the next six years; this is not something that will occur immediately in Ontario. Quite frankly, Minister, the association expected you to provide more direct services for these individuals and the dollars they need now.

Finally, you're still silent on your broken promise on an increase for Ontarians with disabilities and their benefits package. When are you going to pony up the money you promised in the last election?

OLYMPIC ATHLETES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): On behalf of New Democrats, I want to congratulate all the athletes from Ontario who participated in the recent Winter Olympics in Italy. They are fabulous athletes, they made us all very proud and they deserve all of our thanks for their dedication, their commitment and their training.

We were thrilled with all of their achievements, but I have to say that in our household we were particularly thrilled with the achievement of the women's hockey team and of Jeff Buttle of Sudbury. All the best to all the athletes in their future endeavours.

SERVICES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): This is in response to the Minister of Community and Social Services' announcement. This is not the announcement that Ontario's persons with disabilities have been waiting for. What would really be fair to them? What have they really been waiting for? What could this minister really be doing to help Ontarians with disabilities? She could be increasing disability support rates for people, which she promised she was going to do. She could be implementing the cost-of-living allowance increase on an annual basis, which she said she was going to do. She should keep her promise on getting rid of the national child benefit clawback for people and families receiving ODSP. She can stop throwing people, who don't want to go, out of the last remaining regional centres, like Huronia Regional Centre.

She could increase the employment earnings exemption threshold that is now put on people who have jobs and are also on Ontario disability support. In fact, people are sending petitions to this Legislature calling for the government to do that very thing. People with disabilities are entitled to the full support of their government with respect to income security and the dignity of a job, they say. They are also saying that the pride in making meaningful contributions to their community is extremely important, because it enables them to augment Ontario's inadequate disability cheque to keep up with the ever-increasing cost of living. They want an immediate increase in the employment earnings exemption threshold for ODSP recipients so they are able to keep more of what they earn without the government clawing back their disability support; they have a double clawback, Minister.

There are some ideas you can implement to help them out.

EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It's a pleasure to speak to the Minister of Education's omnibus bill, the very type of bill that he and many other Liberals

used to loathe when introduced by the Conservative Party.

I want to briefly comment on the teacher induction program and say that, as useful as the idea is, we are looking for the details, because we want to know who is going to be running the program and who is going to be paying for the program, because we know there are going to be extra costs. We hope the boards are not going to be subsidizing or having to find another line to subsidize yet something else that the minister obviously says is good to do. So we're looking forward to the details in that regard.

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With respect to the trustee salary increase, I want to say that what the Tories used to do was a terrible, terrible thing. They minimized the trustees. They trivialized them. They beat them up on a regular basis. Yes, this government with this measure is making progress in terms of respecting the work that the trustees do, and that is a very useful thing to do indeed.

However, I point out that, on the one hand where Monsieur Kennedy says that we need to respect the trustees, where he finds himself at odds with the trustees who disagree with him we have a different sort of relationship that appears. This is where the disrespect of the Liberal government comes in.

Monsieur Ferreira is the chairman of the Peel board. When he and the other trustees refused to submit to this minister and his minions, he decided that he was going to humiliate them. What did he do when he and his minions were not able to persuade the trustees to submit to his authority? He said, "I'm going to call in an investigator and do exactly what Ms. Witmer did when she was in government, when she had three boards investigated by an auditor." Monsieur Kennedy, who says that things are going to be different, decided that he was going to go in and humiliate them, because he says, "In spite of all the things that we've done for you, if you're not willing to make cuts to balance your budgets, we're going to send in an investigator."

Monsieur Kennedy says, "We want to be able to have a partnership." Well, in this omnibus bill, the partnership that he talks about with trustees who disagree with him is the following:

"Personal liability of members of the board

"If a board that is subject to an order made under subsection 257.31(2) or (3) applies any of its funds otherwise than as the minister orders or authorizes, the members of the board who voted for the application are jointly and severally liable for the amount so applied, which may be recovered in a court of competent jurisdiction." So much for respect and partnership with trustees. So when they disagree with you—"We humiliate you and we're going to make you pay."

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would ask members if they'd like to join me in thanking this par-

ticular group of pages, which has done such a fine job for us during this session of the Legislature.

Applause.

VISITORS

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): From the members' east gallery, I'd like to introduce to the members of the Ontario Legislature Dick and Susan Farrow from the great village of Thornloe in the equally great riding of Timiskaming—Cochrane.

ORAL QUESTIONS

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound—Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. Minister, on April 29, 2005, you had a meeting at the Chalmers Group offices with your wife on what was to be a meeting to do with your daughter's education choices. My question is to do with the minutes. Is it your usual practice to take minutes at a meeting that has to do with personal family matters?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): If I recall correctly, the Leader of the Opposition made some accusations and made a complaint to the Integrity Commissioner. He has delivered his report. I accept that report entirely. They complained, but they are not prepared to accept that report.

Mr. Miller: Minister, I have three children attending post-secondary education. We held many family meetings to do with their education choices. Our meetings were held at the kitchen table, and no minutes were taken.

I'd like to come back to your minutes. Why would you record, in the minutes of the meeting about your daughter's education, the fact that Mrs. Takhar went out to make lunch arrangements, or why would you record that you went out to make phone calls? Why would these details be recorded in the minutes of the meeting?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: As I have said already, all these issues have been dealt with by the Integrity Commissioner, and I accept his report.

Mr. Miller: Even the Integrity Commissioner is sceptical about your minutes. In his report he states, "I am sceptical as to the legitimacy of these notes. Perhaps my scepticism is in part caused by my concern as to why this meeting at Chalmers was held in the first place and why Mr. Jeyanayangam was invited to participate." Minister, when did Mr. Jeyanayangam record the minutes of this meeting? Did you witness him writing the minutes or did he create the minutes at a later date after the meeting?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I thought that was what the Integrity Commissioner was supposed to do, and that's exactly

what he did. They asked for the report; they should accept that report.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener—Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Health. Minister, can you tell us whether or not all 152 hospitals in Ontario will have their budgets approved and balanced by the end of this fiscal year; in other words, the end of this month?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I had the opportunity in a media scrum earlier in the week to indicate that while we have made considerable progress on the file of having all hospitals suitably in balance by the end of this fiscal year, we're projecting that 139 of 152 hospitals in the province of Ontario will have completed their process. We think this is an accomplishment. I acknowledge that in these limited instances there is more work to do. We're pouring on the steam with a view toward getting all those hospitals into a circumstance of a stable, financial footing, so they can work within the long-term funding we have provided. I remind the honourable member that our party was the first in the history of Ontario to deliver stable, multi-year funding to our hospitals. This year's allocation: about \$600 million.

Mrs. Witmer: Minister, the hospital budget process, according to the hospitals, is in shambles. The deadlines that have been set are yours, and let's review them. The agreements were supposed to be signed on November 30—deadline missed. Then it was January 31, 2006—deadline missed. Then you said that 139 of 152 would be signed by the middle of February—deadline missed. Now you've set this new deadline of March 31. However, you did say this week that that deadline would result in only about 139 being signed.

We are talking about funding for last year, 2005-06, the year that is ending March 31. These are your deadlines. You continue to miss them. How much longer are you going to create uncertainty for hospitals?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: It's always a bit galling to hear the honourable member, who was the longest-serving Minister of Health in a government that closed 28 hospitals and shut down 7,000 hospital beds, talk about shambles.

The circumstances are clear. We fundamentally believe that it's appropriate, that's it's a reasonable expectation to place on our hospitals, the largest single line item in the government's budget at more than \$12 billion, that we work with them to develop their capacities to operate in budget and live within those means, which are Ontarians' means and which are available. We think there's been a lot of progress made. I'm the first to acknowledge that, as always in the health portfolio, there is more work to do. The good news on that point is that we're not out of energy like the honourable member and her party; rather, we have all the energy in the world to deliver benefits to the patients of Ontario. That's what we're in

the midst of doing, and we're making awfully good progress on that point.

Mrs. Witmer: The minister should get his facts right on hospitals. We were the ones who made sure they had new emergency rooms, cardiac centres, cancer centres and dialysis centres. Minister, you were the ones who made the promise—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order. I'm hearing way too much from the ministry benches.

The member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

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Mrs. Witmer: Mr. Speaker, I don't think they like to be reminded of the truth.

Anyway, you made a promise that hospital budgets were going to be balanced. You said there would be no hospital bailouts. But we now hear that the Ministry of Health staff are under the gun, running around the province pleading with hospitals to sign agreements, asking people, "What's it going to take?"

But, as I say, it's only rumour, because for all your talk of transparency and accountability, that's all it is. You have forced the hospitals to sign confidential accountability agreements. Again I ask you, how long are you going to create this atmosphere of uncertainty for hospitals in this province?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: Speaking of uncertainty, those of us in the Legislature are operating with some today about the change in position of the Conservative Party as relates to the children of the province of Ontario. It's interesting that the honourable member hasn't been on her feet today to tell us why the word that her party gave just two days ago to Ontario's children, related to Bill 210, has been eviscerated—kind of like hospital budgets over two years when that party was in office.

The honourable member stands in her place and talks about the word "shambles," but the reality is that there are two parties in this Legislature that have cut funding for Ontario's hospitals. They sit on that side of the House. The unseemly record of that honourable member's party included a \$557-million cut, closing 28 hospitals and 7,000 hospital beds. That's the legacy that the honourable member claims we are jealous of. Nothing could be further from the truth.

CHILD POVERTY

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, the McGuinty government says that helping children is a top priority. If that's true, why is one in six Ontario children living in poverty under the McGuinty government?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I appreciate that comment, and I will tell you that today I listened very carefully while Campaign 2000 gave another report talking about children across the

country and the poverty issues that they face. All of us, all levels of government, are compelled to come to the table to make life better for children.

Maybe I can share with the leader some of the good things that have happened since Dalton McGuinty became the Premier. One of those was an immediate increase of 3% for those who are on social assistance—something that they had not seen in absolutely years. Let me share with you that today we have fewer children on welfare in this province since the day we took office and certainly since the days that both you and your Conservative colleagues were in government. We have fewer here in Ontario on welfare than we had, and we have more work to do. We are rolling up our sleeves and getting to that work.

Mr. Hampton: The fact remains that under the McGuinty government, which continues to give speeches that children are a priority, there are 443,000 children in Ontario living in poverty. A third of those children have parents who work full-time all year round, and yet even though they work full-time all year round, they still do not have enough money to pay for the necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter for the children. You continue to say that children are a priority. Well, why do we have this sorry situation, 443,000 children still living in poverty, in the third year of the McGuinty government?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We understand that when we have children living in poverty, it's likely that their parents are living in poverty as well. And for the first time in more than a decade, it was this government that raised the minimum wage for the first time in almost 15 years. For those same working families, we know that for those who are on social assistance, we've made the system better. We know we have more work to do, but we have consistently moved the ball forward when it comes to children in this province. One of the best things we did was launch Best Start.

I might tell this leader opposite that you need to get on the telephone with your friend Jack Layton in Ottawa to find out what part you might play in having ruined the best child care program that Ontario has ever seen. That's your responsibility when it comes to children in this province.

Mr. Hampton: It's astounding that the McGuinty government thinks that playing the blame game, that blaming somebody else is going to provide food, clothing and shelter—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. We have to remember that one member has the floor. That member may either ask or, in some cases, respond to the question, but only one member at a time.

Mr. Hampton: I think it's astounding that the McGuinty government thinks that playing the blame game is going to make a difference for poor kids. I think Ontario's poorest children would be better off if the McGuinty government simply kept your promises.

For example, the national child benefit is \$1,500 a year that the federal government makes available to the

poorest children in this province, and what does the McGuinty government do? You claw back that \$1,500 a year from those poorest children in the province.

Dalton McGuinty said, "The clawback is wrong, and we will end it." Well, Minister, in the third year of the McGuinty government, when are you going to stop clawing back \$1,500 a year from the poorest kids in Ontario?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I appreciate that you keep throwing numbers about, but I will tell you that since we became the government, we immediately stopped that increase of that child care clawback. What that has meant to families in Ontario is almost an additional \$40 million in their hands. That's what Dalton McGuinty did upon becoming the Premier of this province, and we are doing more. We do have a list as long as your arm, because that's how many things we have brought forward to make life better for families in this province, including children.

This is not about blame; this is an opportunity that you have right at your ready: to call that leader of your national party. Best Start is well known across the nation as the best program to give kids the lift they need in life, and yet that program is at risk because your friends in Ottawa can't see that Best Start will be funded by the federal government, as long as you and that party are over there not picking up the phone. You have a responsibility to get in the game for children in this province. You need to take responsibility for what's going on, and I expect you to make that phone call.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Hampton: To the Minister of Community and Social Services: Minister, 443,000 children in Ontario didn't just fall into poverty on January 23, federal election day. They've been in poverty for three years under your government.

But if you want to talk about child care, I want to ask you about this. Dalton McGuinty promised \$300 million of new provincial funding to create 330,000 new child care spaces. Now, three years into the McGuinty government, no one has seen the \$300 million of new provincial funding; no one has been able to find it. I understand that you're very good at blaming someone else, but you're in your third year of government now. My question is simply this: When are we going to see the \$300 million in new provincial child care funding from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: This is not about the blame; we're prepared to take responsibility. For the first time ever, a housing program that benefits low-income Ontarians for better housing; you failed to do that when you were the government. In addition to that, a labour market agreement that helps people who lose employment that affects their children finally has funding for proper training programs. For the first time, a 3% increase in homeless shelters. For the first time, we finally saw funding go directly to kids and children's breakfast programs, something that you just talked about, even when you were in government. And I will remind you that when you were in government and you hit 1993—we remember it well—

you didn't, not for one moment, stop to see what you were cutting. You cut across the board in your social contract, including every single program for children that Ontario had. That's your record. I'll stack this record up against yours any day of the week.

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Mr. Hampton: It is astounding that virtually every day we hear the McGuinty government stand up and boast about how well Ontario's economy is doing, about how much money there is, and yet, what do we see? We see the McGuinty government clawing back \$1,500 a year from the poorest kids in the province. We see the McGuinty government that's failed to put the \$300 million into child care that you promised. We see the McGuinty government fail to increase social assistance benefits and ODSP benefits to match the rise in the cost of living—again, something that you promised.

I simply say, stop playing the blame game. One day you're blaming the federal government; one day you're blaming a former government; one day you're blaming something that may have happened in the 1980s or 1990s. You say the economy is good. Well, then, where's the money for the poorest children? Where's the child care money that you promised?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I am amazed that this leader wants to talk about child care. Your federal cousins brought down the government that had funded the best program for children the nation has ever seen. That program is called Best Start. Your friends, supposedly the ones who care about children, did that. That's your kind of record for the NDP.

I know that it means that when families are working, families are doing better. It's hard to square. The fact is, over 200,000 people are working in Ontario today that weren't before we became the government. That means more support for families when families are working. That's the kind of economic plan we've brought to the table.

It is true, there are fewer children on welfare today than before we became the government, but we have more work to do. We work every day to do more for children. We will continue to do more for children. Along with my colleague in the ministry for children, we are doing work through children's aid—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: I think the members of the McGuinty government would be wise to recognize that it was the voters of Canada who gave Paul Martin the boot.

Again, the issue is poor children in Ontario. The issue is the lowest-income children in Ontario and your failure to keep your promises to do anything to help them. So I wonder what the priority of the McGuinty government is. But I see what the priority is. Tonight, the Premier is hosting an \$8,000-a-table fundraiser for the Ontario Liberal Party. I say to the minister, \$8,000 would put a lot of clothes on a lot of poor children. It would help pay the rent. It would put food on the table. It would do a lot of good things. Poor children need help now. They don't need more broken promises—

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: Let me say again that your federal cousins of the NDP are the ones who took that government down and forced that election. The result of that is a Conservative bunch up in Ottawa who think it's okay to rip up child care agreements that this province made with our colleague government in Ottawa. We didn't make that deal with a political party; we made that deal with the government, and I say they stand by their word in that agreement.

We need that money because it is linked to our Best Start. That Best Start program is the best program in the nation to get kids off to a great start, and it means over \$1 billion lost to Ontario. Can that party really stand up and be proud of their record in what they've brought forward to Parliament?

Here's our record: an immediate increase to welfare and ODSP; an immediate increase to homeless shelters, which do affect families; 200,000 more people who are working who weren't working before we started. That means real wealth—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

PROVINCIAL DEFICIT

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie—Lincoln): A question to the Minister of Finance: The minister may very well know that the Ontario Chamber of Commerce president, Len Crispino, said in a statement this week, "It is time to eliminate the provincial deficit and to improve our economic growth." He went on to say, "Urgent action is needed in the 2006 provincial budget to restore Ontario to firm economic footing."

We looked at the books that you have produced and see that you had a record 13% increase in revenue last year, and we suspect that you're going to be clawing in a lot of revenue just like that with your budget this year from hard-pressed working families and businesses. Minister, please tell me that you're going to take Mr. Crispino's advice and, with these big increases in Liberal revenue, you're going to produce a balanced budget come the end of March.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Upon assuming office, the Provincial Auditor confirmed that the previous government not only didn't balance their budget, they left a \$5.5-billion deficit. Spending year over year in the last four years of their government: 6%, 7%, 8% and 8%. A rapid rise in expenditure, but was it for health care? No. Was it for education? No. It was for tax cuts for the rich.

The people of Ontario rejected that party. They rejected their legacy of an increased debt to this province, the largest increase in the province's debt since our friends in the little red rump over there; a very large increase in the debt.

We laid out a plan in our first budget. Minister Sorbara laid out a plan that we are achieving. The deficit has gone from \$5.5 billion to \$2.4 billion, and if we don't need the reserve this year it will be—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hudak: I'm as likely to believe what he just said as I am to believe the Minister of Transportation in a sworn affidavit.

The minister full well knows, your own books show, that your revenue grab last year was a massive 13% increase. The minister very well knows that the average programming spending increase under this government has been 8% a year.

The minister likes to say that what's up is up; what's down is down. I'll tell you what's up. Out-migration, people leaving the province of Ontario, is up. Taxes on working families are up. Taxes on businesses are up. Hydro rates are way up. Bankruptcies in Ontario are up. Personal bankruptcies in Ontario are up. Hydro costs I've mentioned. Manufacturing job losses are way up there. The only things getting down are working families and small businesses trying to make ends meet. Minister, surely you're going to balance the books and start giving a break to hard-pressed taxpayers with your upcoming budget.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I am proud to say that revenues are up. Revenues are up because more people are working. Revenues are up because profits in our businesses are up. Revenues are up because unemployment is down. And to answer the member very clearly and unequivocally, we are investing in health care, we are investing in education. What that means is better hospitals. It means better schools. We reject your tax cut. We reject your taking your \$2.5 billion out of health care.

Yes, revenues are up because the economy has performed well. Profits are up and employment is up. Everything that should be up is up; everything that should be down is down. And we're going to keep them down and out for as long as we can.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I can wait. There are members who wish to ask questions.

New question?

1450

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Before your election, you promised to tie ODSP rates to the real cost of living, but you broke that promise. Tiny changes have been made, definitely, for the small percentage of recipients who can work—if they're lucky enough to beat the odds and actually find a job—but the vast majority of people who depend on ODSP for income cannot work. They have been forced to live well below the poverty line for far too many years. You promised to change that. When will you increase rates by 3% each and every year like you promised, and when will you

include a shelter allowance that reflects real rental charges?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): What we did do, I'll say to this member, is that we said we would increase social assistance by the cost of living. In 2003, that would have been an increase of 1.9%. What we did instead in our first budget was increase social assistance by 3%.

What we have also done is look at the system itself. I will tell you that there are significant barriers in our welfare system that need to be torn down, and we have spent the lion's share of our time working on the actual barriers to employment. I hope that this member opposite understands that items like increasing the employment start-up benefit to \$500 when people find a job, because of the kinds of incidental costs there always are, is a good thing. I hope she'll also see that extending the health benefit card for people that need to make that leap into the workforce—that she could admit today that that's a good thing. We have far exceeded what we said we were going to do, but we have far more work to do.

Ms. Horwath: I was speaking about the basic rate that ODSP recipients get in the province of Ontario. It would be interesting for this minister to realize that they've barely had a raise at all in the last 11 years. In fact, they have less money today in real terms than they did in 1995. Since 2003, in real terms, people living with disabilities have seen their support decrease by nearly 3% since you came into office. Single people on ODSP still get about \$950 a month, not to mention your clawback of the baby bonus for families. That's what they got in 1995. Minister, when are you going to keep your promise and increase the basic rates for ODSP for people with disabilities in the province of Ontario?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I hope the member opposite is always prepared to acknowledge when the government is doing very good things to improve the system. We had an announcement about a month ago now that talked about significant changes to the Ontario disability support program. There are many, many people on our rolls who want to be working and need support in order to work. It is the largest change that we have made since we took office, which is, for example, having people who are on disability maintain their drug card if they're able to find work. Currently, we only have 9% of the people on Ontario disability who are having any earnings at all. That's not enough, because we know there are people who can work, but our system is one that sets up barriers. So thanks to the excellent work of our parliamentary assistant Deb Matthews, and now our parliamentary assistant Ernie Parsons, we rolled up our sleeves and said, "We've got to look at the nuts and bolts of our program and get rid of barriers." That's what we're doing, and the people are telling us that we are doing well. We are taking down barriers, because if people—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Minister, there's a very important bill before the House that's going to help children who need help the most. If Bill 210 becomes law in this province, thousands of children who need protection will be better off than they are now. They would have a much better chance of finding permanent, stable and loving homes.

Shamefully, John Tory and his caucus are holding this bill hostage, even though they agree with the bill and have committed to passing it. By doing so, they're holding our children hostage, our most vulnerable children, who need our help the most. Minister, can you explain how Bill 210 would help our children who need protection to find a permanent, stable and loving home?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Leeds–Grenville and the member for Erie–Lincoln will come to order. The member for Erie–Lincoln will come to order. I am going to need to name the member for Erie–Lincoln. I will name Mr. Hudak, the member for Erie–Lincoln.

Mr. Hudak was escorted from the chamber.

The Speaker: Response.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm happy to have the opportunity to respond to my colleague the member from Mississauga East, who very obviously puts the interests of our vulnerable children way ahead of the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from Erie–Lincoln. Shame on you. Shame on you. You should be ashamed of yourselves. You are in this House chasing ghosts when there are vulnerable children out there who need your support. You would prefer to chase ghosts, chasing the Minister of Transportation when there are vulnerable children out there who need permanent, caring homes.

Let me tell you what the member from Leeds–Grenville said just two evenings ago. He said, "When it comes to a vote the Progressive Conservative opposition will be"—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Order. Supplementary.

Mr. Fonseca: It's clear that this bill works for children who need our help most. John Tory and his Conservative caucus are turning their backs, as we saw, on our children yet again—

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Keep the clock—sorry. Yes, with a point of order.

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: It's traditional in this place that a member be referred to by their riding, not their name. I'd ask you to remind this member.

The Speaker: That is a point of order. We do not use proper names in the House. I will remind all members to

use the riding or title of the member who is being referred to.

The member for Mississauga East.

1500

Mr. Fonseca: Yes, it is true. The member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey has turned his back on the children yet again. It's clear that Bill 210 is legislation that works in the best interests of our most vulnerable children, but I know that helping our vulnerable children find permanent homes is not the only way that Bill 210 achieves this. Minister, can you give us another example of how Bill 210 will help to achieve working in the best interests of our children?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: As the member said, Bill 210 is about providing permanent care in supportive homes for children, our most vulnerable children who have experienced very traumatic beginnings to their lives. In addition to that, Bill 210 will provide better supports for parents who are experiencing temporary challenges. It will provide for mediation in problem situations and avoid lengthy, expensive, traumatic court battles.

This bill is about protecting our kids, 9,000 of whom right now are basically children of this province, where we are in fact the parents. I plead, I call for unanimous consent for third reading without further debate so that we can go ahead with looking after the children of this province.

MUNICIPAL JURISDICTION

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): My question is for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. In November, Ottawa held a rural summit to improve relations between the rural residents and the urban residents in the city of Ottawa. Many of the recommendations of the rural summit have been adopted by the city of Ottawa in their 2006 budget, and I want to congratulate the city of Ottawa on their efforts.

Your officials were there, Minister, and there were several recommendations dealing with changes that would be necessary to provincial legislation and provincial regulations. Can you report to the Legislature what response you have to those recommendations?

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): I would like to thank the member for the question. We're always looking at ways in which we can improve the relationship between municipalities and the province of Ontario. We're looking at the City of Ottawa Act. I've had a number of conversations with the mayor of Ottawa over the years as to how that can be done, both through the Municipal Act and the City of Ottawa Act. I have not spoken to him specifically with respect to the recommendations that may have come out of the particular meeting that he's talking about, but I would be more than pleased to review that with my officials and get back to the member as to what the government intends to do with respect to those recommendations.

Mr. Sterling: Let me help the minister. One of the recommendations was to allow the municipality of the city of Ottawa to have different licensing structures for the urban and rural areas. Another recommendation was for the province to bring forward legislation and regulation to allow, as necessary, the wetland evaluation system and to provide an appeal process for the method of classification to a wetland.

Mr. Minister, can you promise that you will at least look at these two very important issues for the rural residents of the city of Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. Gerretsen: I can certainly state to the member that we will be looking at that. There was a meeting, I should say, about two or three weeks ago, when a significant number of members of the cabinet met with the leadership from the city of Ottawa. I was not at that meeting at the time; I was out of the country. But I know from talking to my colleagues that it was a very successful meeting. A number of recommendations that came out of that meeting are currently being reviewed by a number of different ministries. Action will accordingly be taken at some time in the future. We will advise the member of that at that time.

WASTE DIVERSION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a question for the Minister of the Environment. Yesterday, Michigan moved a step closer to banning the import of foreign garbage. With only 90 days' notice from Michigan and limited local storage capacity for garbage, Toronto and the GTA communities could quickly find themselves in a garbage crisis. The McGuinty government promised a 60% diversion rate of garbage by 2008, yet the current waste diversion rate is only 30%. Can you tell us, Minister, will you table your plan detailing how you intend to get the garbage diversion rate up to 60% by 2008?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): I think that in circumstances like this it's often easier to play politics with an issue than to deal with the real facts. It is true that on March 1, the Michigan Senate and the House agreed to pass identical bills. What that means is they harmonized bills. That procedure was not at all unexpected by our government. There is still an important legislative hurdle that needs to be cleared in Washington, and that's enabling legislation.

We have known for quite some time that it is not a long-term solution for this province that municipalities continue to send waste to Michigan. The ministry is monitoring the situation very closely. We're dealing with the progress of the bills in the federal government, we're working closely with our federal counterparts to look at the implications of the US legislation, and we're working very closely with municipalities that currently send their waste to Michigan to determine what their plans are, and to give them the tools they need to manage their waste here in the province.

Mr. Hampton: It was a simple question: Where is the McGuinty government's waste diversion plan? You promised to divert 60% of waste by 2008. Where's that plan? Obviously, nowhere. Where is the McGuinty government on its promise to ban organics in landfills? Nowhere. You promised a program for used tire recycling. Now you burn them at a cement kiln, despite the negative impacts on human health and the environment. Your only waste diversion strategy is to amend the Environmental Assessment Act so you can force new waste dumps on rural Ontario communities.

I'm going to ask the question again. This is a very specific promise Dalton McGuinty made. Where is the McGuinty government on its plan to divert 60% of waste away from dumps? Where is the detailed plan?

Hon. Ms. Broten: We have worked and continue to work very closely with municipalities and industry to increase waste diversion and to facilitate the establishment of disposal capacity within the province for Ontario's residual waste. We continue to work with specific municipalities and municipal organizations such as ROMA and AMO to develop the tools the municipalities need to manage their waste within the province. Key areas that we currently are focusing on and working with those municipalities on are to increase waste diversion, to improve the EA process, to facilitate new technologies and better management of residual waste, and the development of long-term waste plans in this province. Those are the active steps we're taking. We are working shoulder to shoulder with municipalities, which have the primary responsibility to manage waste. We will manage waste within this province, but we won't play politics with this issue.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to ask all members of the House to join me in recognizing Mr. Richard Brennan and saying *au revoir*, good luck, goodbye, and we wish you well.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The time for making statements like that is not during oral questions. It helps to maintain order if we do not do such things as introductions or other comments during oral questions. I have stopped the clock, as you will notice, but I would prefer that not happen in the future.

1510

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I was on the standing committee on social policy that just last week made Bill 210 an even stronger bill that better protects our most vulnerable children. I am shocked that the opposition leader and his Conservative caucus have decided to hold these wonderful children hostage by not passing Bill 210. During the committee hearing, it was clear that the Conservatives support Bill 210. When it's about our children, it is not a bill to play games with.

Our government brought forward amendments to address the concerns of the aboriginal community. I have heard from members of the aboriginal community who tell me that currently vulnerable aboriginal children are often moved off reserve when taken into the care of a children's aid society. They lose the connection to their culture and their community. Minister, our government made 20 amendments to Bill 210 that specifically help to address the needs of aboriginal children and the aboriginal community. Can you explain how these amendments came about?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I want to thank the member from London-Fanshawe for all of his work, and the work of all committee members from all the parties in this House who came to the table in the interests of vulnerable kids.

Specifically, for aboriginal kids, we have spent many, many days and many long hours meeting with leaders on the ground, service delivery partners off reserve and on reserve. Yes, 20 of the 35 amendments that came forward to Bill 210 represent the interests specifically of the aboriginal community. It is so important that this bill move forward. In fact, aboriginal kids are disproportionately represented in Ontario's child protection system, thereby preventing them from enjoying their traditions. So I do not understand why the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ramal: This is just more of the same: the Tories turning their backs on the children, failing once again to meet their pressing needs.

Our government always talks about the importance of being accountable to the people of Ontario. Through the amendments you made to Bill 210, we also strengthened the accountability of children's aid societies to the children and the families they serve. Minister, can you explain in greater detail how we strengthened our accountability with Bill 210, which is currently before the House, one more thing that the opposition leader and his caucus are saying no to by not passing this bill today?

Interjections.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I hear members of the opposition saying that they're not saying no to passage of this bill. So I move unanimous consent for third reading of Bill 210, without further debate.

The Speaker: That cannot happen during question period. New question?

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): My question is to the Minister of the Environment. The Michigan state Senate has just unanimously passed legislation that would ban imports of foreign trash. It is yet another step closer to a possible border closure, and yet your government has no plan to deal with this crisis. From October 2004 to September 2005, Ontario's waste

shipment to Michigan increased by 100,000 tonnes. You know that there is only limited capacity for dealing with the garbage we produce, and yet you have done nothing. Your predecessor promised almost three years ago that she was going to fix the EA process in the province. It was supposed to be done in 90 days. We still haven't seen anything. Your amazing plan for dealing with this is non-existent. You cannot rely on the tired old excuse that this is a municipal matter. If the border closes, it's a provincial matter. Where is your plan?

Hon. Laurel C. Broten (Minister of the Environment): It is important for Ontarians to understand that our government takes this issue very seriously. We are in constant contact with the legislators in Michigan. My colleague the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs recently met with Governor Grandholm of Michigan, and we work very closely. I've spoken to Ambassador McKenna about this issue. I look forward to speaking to Ambassador Wilson about it.

Dealing with the issues of waste in this province is something that we are currently rolling up our sleeves and working on. We have sited landfills in this province to deal in Ontario with a made-in-Ontario waste solution, which I have to say was something that was very much lacking under the former government. The former government put its head in the sand and did not want to deal with the issues.

We dealt with funding for blue box programs. We've dealt with the composition of organics. We've sited landfills. We're fixing the EA process. The list goes on, and I look forward to talking to you more about it.

Ms. Scott: There is a garbage crisis in Ontario, and just before Christmas John Tory challenged your government to deal with Ontario's garbage crisis and to bring forward a plan before the end of March. He challenged you to—

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: A member of the opposition just momentarily said you shouldn't use a person's first name; you should use the riding. So if we're going to impose that upon the opposition and the government equally, I think that would be fair.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I agree, and it is a point of order. I'm sure the member will take note of that.

Ms. Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just before Christmas, our leader from Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey challenged your government to deal with Ontario's garbage crisis and to bring forward a plan before the end of March. He challenged you to bring together municipal leaders, environmentalists, experts and other affected parties on waste management issues to take action and to come up with a solution. Some of these groups, like the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, have already been working to find a solution to this province-wide problem, but they need your help.

Minister, we have seen no evidence of any effort on your part to respond to our leader's challenge and to do

the responsible thing. Will you commit here today to bringing forward a plan to deal with Ontario's garbage by the end of March 2006?

Hon. Ms. Broten: Unlike the member opposite, I believe in finding solutions by rolling up my sleeves and working with those groups—not having a show, not having a summit, not having an extraordinary affair. This is about sitting down with municipalities and working with them to ensure they have the tools that they need to manage waste. We have sat down with municipalities across this province. We're talking to them: "What tools do you need to manage your waste? How do you want to manage waste in your community?"

We've taken a look at AMO's waste strategy. We welcome their ideas and discussion. I've met with Roger Anderson. I've met with NGOs. We are working across this province to develop a made-in-Ontario waste solution so we can have a sustainable solution for our province—increased waste diversion, new technological solutions. All of those issues need to be examined, but we need at the same time to ensure that they're clean, they protect the environment and they don't take away from the 3Rs.

I know what kind of future I want to leave my kids, and it's a clean, green, healthy future in this province. That's what we're working on.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): A question to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities: On March 7, some 9,100 teachers, counsellors and librarians at Ontario's 24 community colleges could be on strike. The number one issue for these educators is updating the workload formula. They need smaller class sizes, more teachers and more faculty time for students. Negotiations are resuming today, and they continue to March 6. Will you commit to working with college presidents to negotiate a fair deal that improves quality at these colleges?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): As the member will know, it's essential that we encourage the parties who are directly at the table from both management and labour to work this issue through and to negotiate a settlement. They've been speaking for a long time. We encourage them to speak some more.

The government of Ontario has supported students in our college system by investing very heavily through the Reaching Higher plan. That investment, as we've already seen through the interim accountability agreements, has resulted in more faculty in our colleges—and many of these colleges hadn't hired a new full-time faculty member in more than a decade—updated classrooms and additional educational resources; in other words, the very thing we said in the budget we were going to achieve, which was a better student experience, value for every dollar invested. That's our commitment. But I will con-

tinue to encourage the parties to work through a resolution. It is essential to the success of the college system that the parties work out a resolution.

1520

Mr. Marchese: Students, educators and you yourself have emphasized the importance of improving quality. That means, among other things, more faculty and more faculty time for students and with students. We already know that more and more college students get their instruction from overworked part-time instructors. It's time to reverse the trend. College teachers are pleading with you to update the workload formula, to commit to smaller class sizes and more faculty time for students. How will you help them achieve that?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Unlike the legacy left by the member's party or the party that now sits in official opposition, who both took money away from student education, we have invested in students. That investment allows for precisely what the member outlines: more faculty—if you have more faculty, it means you have more contact time between students and faculty—updated classrooms and additional resources. In other words, you invest and you get more. That's what we've been doing. It's precisely what we've been doing. We have been able, through these investments, to achieve the very issues the member outlines.

As far as the labour relations issue is concerned, as the member would know, it is important that the parties at the table be encouraged to recognize how important this issue is and to continue to work hard and obtain a settlement, so that the system can continue long past March 7.

ONTARIO MEDAL FOR GOOD CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): My question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. During the last couple of weeks, you have done a superb job of recognizing outstanding Ontarians. From my riding of Mississauga West, among our many outstanding citizens you have honoured Marilyn Cochrane with an Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship for her initiative, leadership and determination in finding a cure for cystic fibrosis. Marilyn has dedicated the last 17 years to raising funds for research into this deadly disease. Can you tell the House a little bit more about your plans in the future with regard to recognizing outstanding Ontarians?

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I want to thank the member for Mississauga West. The real people who have done the superb job are people like Marilyn Cochrane from your riding. In fact, there are unsung heroes in all of our ridings across Ontario. If you have been fortunate enough to see them in action, they are amazing Ontario heroes.

The following people won the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship: Luigi Battochio from Schumacher, Gordon Buck of Ohsweken, Norman L. Clements from Uxbridge, Marilyn Cochrane, Linda Cupido from Bur-

lington, Hosain Danishwar from Toronto—these are people who are quietly raising money or helping raise awareness for a disease like cystic fibrosis, and we give them this medal to say thank you on behalf of the people of Ontario. They are very grateful and most appreciative. This, hopefully, will encourage them to do more good work in the future.

Mr. Delaney: Minister, would you clarify comments made by the member from Burlington last week? He suggested that his office was not advised in advance that the Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship ceremony was taking place and that you may have put the blame on the Office of the Lieutenant Governor. Could you please clarify that?

Hon. Mr. Colle: These award ceremonies are put together by the Ontario honours and awards secretariat. They do an excellent job. Those of you who were at the tsunami awards witnessed that. They really go out of their way to help recognize these people.

It's unfortunate that the member from Burlington said he didn't receive notification, but we've checked and he did. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that if a member doesn't get notified or there is some miscommunication, I'll take responsibility. The main thing is, please participate in these events. There's going to be a new series of events coming up in April. The calendar has been changed. They used to have the Ontario Volunteer Service Awards in the fall. This year they'll be coming into your communities in April. They will recognize, I think, 8,000 great Ontarians, so please attend. Be part of this great event that says thank you to these unsung heroes in all of our communities.

MINISTERIAL CONDUCT

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound—Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Transportation. I want to question you about your involvement with the Chalmers company. You've continually been saying that you had no involvement with the company. The Integrity Commissioner's report says:

“Q: Before you were elected, what involvement on a day-to-day operational basis did you have with the Chalmers companies?”

“A: No day-to-day involvement at all. I've never had day-to-day involvement.”

Yet we now learn that you were receiving \$2,000 per month based on five days' work from minutes of a board meeting. But the minutes reveal that you say you're putting in much more time than that. You say that \$2,000 works out to \$25 per hour.

Minister, this means, in a company that you had no involvement with, that you were actually putting in more than 80 hours a month and, according to the minutes, you wanted to be paid more.

In a letter of May 20, 1994, from the company, a Mr. Boaden writes, “It has been of great concern to me that you are still involved in the day-to-day operation of the company.” Minister, this letter comes from a sworn

affidavit from you. What is the true story? Did you work for the company or not?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): All these issues have been dealt with by the Integrity Commissioner and he has issued a report. I accept that report. The Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that the Integrity Commissioner took seven months to do the report. Now it appears to me that they're not prepared to accept that report.

Mr. Miller: Minister, you keep changing your story. You say you didn't work for the company, yet there's a parking spot with "HT" on it. The company had an Ernst and Young opinion about how much to pay you, whether it be \$250 or \$300 an hour. Your political website brags about your involvement with the company.

I'll go back to the Integrity Commissioner, where he says:

"Q: The material that's on your website refers to the Chalmers Group of Companies and, to put it bluntly, you seem to be claiming credit for awards that you received consequent upon Chalmers being listed as among Canada's top 100 best-management private companies. There is significant reference on both the Liberal website and your website to that effect. There is a bit of a disconnect with that and somebody who had nothing whatever to do with the management of those companies."

What's the truth? Did you work for the company or not?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: Let me repeat—this is the fifth time today—that I agree with the Integrity Commissioner's report. He has dealt with this issue. I know this member has an obsession with this issue, but he should not hold the children of this province hostage because of this issue. They should deal with that issue first; they should deal with Bill 210. That is way more important than this issue is. They should stop this obsession and move on with Bill 210.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent for the Speaker to put the question on the motion for third reading of Bill 210 immediately, without further debate.

Interjection: No.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I haven't even asked yet.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services has asked for unanimous consent for third reading of Bill 210. Agreed? I heard a no.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I ask for unanimous consent of this House to continue the debate with respect to the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations dealing with the Minister of Transportation.

The Speaker: Agreed? I heard a no.

1530

PETITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition signed by many, many people from my riding and elsewhere. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas senior citizens in the province of Ontario should have full health coverage during their golden years;

"Many seniors are required to pay out of pocket to gain Visudyne treatment for the occult and minimally classic form of AMD in the province of Ontario;

"Others that do not have the financial means are forced to idly sit by until they become legally blind, losing all of their independence, dignity and ability to care for themselves;

"Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of blindness, making the condition more common than glaucoma;

"Visudyne treatment is fully covered in British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Yukon Territory, regardless of the form of AMD;

"There should be no discrimination between the types of AMD treatment coverage as there is no cure for AMD of any form: classic, occult or minimally classic;

"Many people treated with the occult form with Visudyne therapy are able to lead independent and fulfilling lives;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the senior citizens of Ontario full OHIP coverage for Visudyne treatment of the occult and minimally classic forms of age-related macular degeneration."

I support this petition. I affix my name to it and send it to the table through Amelia.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads:

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to

community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

This petition has been signed by many residents of the town of Fort Frances, and I have affixed my signature as well.

DIABETES TREATMENT

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to introduce this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We are requesting that all diabetic supplies, including insulin infusion pumps and the supplies required to maintain them, blood glucose test strips, insulin and syringes, as prescribed by” the medical professions “be covered under the Ontario health insurance plan.

“Diabetes costs Canadian taxpayers \$13 billion a year and increasing! It is the leading cause of death and hospitalization in Canada. Many people with diabetes cannot afford the ongoing expense of managing diabetes. They cut corners to save money. They rip test strips in half, cut down on the number of times they test their blood and even reuse lancets and needles. These cost-saving measures often have ... disastrous health consequences.

“Persons with diabetes need and deserve financial assistance to cope with the escalating cost of managing diabetes.

“Every diabetic deserves an equal opportunity in caring for their disease. We think it is in all Ontarians and the government’s best interest to support diabetics with the supplies that each individual needs to obtain optimum glucose control. Good blood glucose control reduces or eliminates kidney failure by 50%, blindness by 76%, nerve damage by 60%, cardiac disease by 35% and even amputations. Just think of how many dollars can be saved by the Ministry of Health if diabetics had a chance to gain optimum glucose control.”

COMMUNITY CENTRE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas in the riding of Etobicoke North, the community of neighbourhoods which include the adjacent subdivisions known locally as Jamestown, Mount Olive, Silverstone and the Kipling Corridor, which correspond closely to Canadian 2001 census tract subdivisions designated as 248.02 and 249.05, and which is bounded by Martin Grove, Mount Olive, Kipling Avenue and the Humber River, has experienced five fatal shootings in the four-month period between August 3 and November 18, 2005; and

“Whereas this same community of neighbourhoods is designated as ‘highly distressed,’ since more than 40% of its residents live below the poverty line (page 33, Poverty by Postal Code, United Way, 2004); and

“Whereas a high proportion of the residents of this community experience many other additive risk factors, which include belonging to a visible minority, speaking a first language other than English, being a new immigrant, possessing poor education, belonging to single-parent families, being unemployed or underemployed, and being susceptible to gang involvement; and

“Whereas this is a disinvested community with very inadequate recreational facilities and with very few existing services for child care and where the status quo offers very little chance of escape from the cycle of poverty and fear and crime; and

“Whereas strong, healthy neighbourhoods are the building blocks of sustainable, competitive cities; and

“Whereas this community is a microcosm of the Canadian mosaic and has the potential to showcase the benefits of Ontario’s diversity and multiculturalism; and

“Whereas the Ontario government has pledged itself to the task of reducing the incidence of violent crime by attacking the underlying causes that erode the social structure of Ontario cities;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To take the lead and work together with the federal government of Canada and the municipality of Toronto to invest in the infrastructure of this high-needs community, by building a community centre with a large swimming pool, with tennis courts, with a large double gymnasium, with adequate space to house daycare facilities for children, with meeting rooms for seniors—a community centre which would be a model of excellence, a centre-piece of renewal for the Jamestown, Mount Olive, Silverstone and Kipling Corridor neighbourhoods; and

“To ensure that funding for suitable programming related to the centre is in place.”

I agree with this petition wholeheartedly and send it via page Matthew from Etobicoke North.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition. It says:

“To the Legislature of Ontario:

“Whereas the \$700,000 cut in funding to the Ontario Library Service (OLS) budget will have a significant impact on the delivery of public library service across the province in areas such as:

“—reductions in the frequency of inter-library loan deliveries;

“—reductions in the SOLS’ consultation services and the elimination of a number of staff positions;

“—the elimination of province-wide research on library and socio-demographic trends that all libraries need for their own planning;

“—the reduction of consortia/charitable purchasing, a service that provides economies-of-scale discounts to libraries on a variety of goods and services;

“—a reduction in the amount of material that is translated for OLS French-language clients;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows:

“To restore funding to the Ontario Library Service (OLS) in order to signal support for the Ontario public library system.”

I will sign this petition in support.

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“People with disabilities are entitled to the full support of their government with respect to income security and the dignity of a job; and

“The Ontario disability support plan does not provide an adequate income to cover the ever-increasing costs of living that people with disabilities face, and those who receive ODSP and find employment are punished with an earnings exemption that is far too low and needs to be increased; and

“An ODSP recipient will have their earnings clawed back by the McGuinty Liberal government if they earn more than just \$160 a month as an individual or only \$235 a month as a family; and

“Employment not only gives people on ODSP the dignity of a job and the pride in making meaningful contributions to their community, it also enables them to augment Ontario’s inadequate disability cheque and keep up with the ever-rising cost of living.

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for an immediate increase to the employment earnings exemption threshold for ODSP recipients so they are able to keep more of what they earn without the government clawing back their disability support.”

I agree with this petition. I’m signing it and sending it down, by way of Yasmeen, to the Clerk’s table.

1540

CHILD CARE

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I have a petition today to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

“Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

“Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

“Whereas Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario’s early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it.”

I agree with this petition and will affix my signature to it.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): “Whereas the Minister of Culture recently announced that there would be funding cuts totalling more than \$1.2 million from Ontario public library services; and

“Whereas over 69 million people visited public libraries in Ontario in 2003 with more than 100 million items circulating; and

“Whereas these cuts will impact us as library users, resulting in delays in how libraries receive new books;

“Therefore, we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Culture to restore the funding for Ontario public library services so that libraries can continue to promote literacy in our communities.”

I have affixed my signature to this.

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): “To the Legislative Assembly:

“Whereas 2,000 people attended a meeting on March 1, 2006, to protest the proposal to expand the Carp landfill site in Ottawa; and

“Whereas there is a high residential development and density near the landfill site; and

“Whereas all the citizens of Stittsville, Goulbourn, Kanata and West Carleton are against this proposal;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislature of Ontario as follows: Do not permit the expansion of the Carp landfill site to take place.”

I sign that with great pleasure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The Chair recognizes the member from Niagara Falls.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to be recognized; I appreciate it.

My petition reads as follows: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario." It's from my riding of Niagara Falls and also from a number of residents from the riding of St. Catharines, so I'm pleased to introduce this.

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I'm pleased to sign my signature to this petition and have page Michael deliver it.

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

As I am in complete agreement, I have affixed my signature here.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): I'd like to announce that, pursuant to standing order 37(a), the member for Waterloo-Wellington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Health concerning the hospital redevelopment at Groves Memorial Community Hospital. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

REPORT, INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Resuming the debate adjourned on February 20, 2006, on the amendment to the motion that the Legislative Assembly adopt the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated January 4, 2006, and approve the recommendation contained therein.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I'm referring to the Votes and Proceedings from March 1, 2006, and of course the Votes and Proceedings confirm the passage of a purported time allocation motion. You are, by virtue of that motion, required to put the question; however, I'm putting to you, sir, that the order recorded in the Orders and Notices paper is out of order, and let me tell you why.

It says, "That, in the case of any division, the members shall be called in once, all divisions taken in succession, and the division bell shall be limited to 10 minutes." As you know, sir, you are going to be called upon, as Speaker, by virtue of the purported order, to put an amendment to a vote and to then put the substantive motion, the main motion, to a vote. I put to you that an order which does not permit members to leave this chamber in between those two votes is very much out of order. We know that one cannot simply retire to the area behind the seats. I know that very personally and intimately. I'm not going to use today to test whether I can go up into the visitors' gallery and do that. But I say to you, sir, that this requires either that you not call this order, because it's out of order, or that you modify it appropriately to put it in order.

I would suggest to you that the procedure that might be adopted—the Speaker has control of this—would be the same procedure we use in votes on private members' public business, and that is to have a brief hiatus when the doors are opened so that members can leave or come in. There may be some members who don't want to vote or abstain, because although the rules don't call it "abstention," we are permitted to abstain, remain in our seats. That's an abstention. Others may duly note that. There may be some members who do not wish to vote on the amendment. There may be some members who do not wish to vote on the main motion. I submit to you, they have that right, and that if the Speaker doesn't amend this by his own authority, accordingly we are being denied that right. It's a point of order and, I put to you as well, it's a matter of privilege.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Thank you, member from Niagara Centre. Your point of order is untimely, because the motion was passed yesterday and the time for raising the objection would have been yesterday. However, if there is unanimous consent of the members of this House, we could have a 30-second hiatus between votes so that members could leave if they so wish.

Is there unanimous consent? It's agreed. There is unanimous consent with respect to modifying the order.

Pursuant to the order of the House dated March 1, 2006, I'm now required to put the question.

On February 5, 2006, Mr. Bradley moved:

"That the Legislative Assembly adopt the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated January 4, 2006, and approve the recommendation contained therein."

On February 20, 2006, Mr. Klees moved that the motion be amended by adding the following thereto: "and that the subject matter of the penalties available under section 34 of the Members' Integrity Act be referred to the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly."

We will deal first with the amendment to the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House that Mr. Klees's amendment carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1551 to 1601.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment to the motion, please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.	Yakabuski, John

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed, please rise one at a time.

Nays

Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Parsons, Ernie
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Patten, Richard
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Peters, Steve
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Peterson, Tim
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Phillips, Gerry
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Pupatello, Sandra
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Qaadri, Shafiq
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Racco, Mario G.
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramal, Khalil
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Ramsay, David
Colle, Mike	Levac, Dave	Rinaldi, Lou
Cordiano, Joseph	Marsales, Judy	Ruprecht, Tony
Craiton, Kim	Matthews, Deborah	Sandals, Liz
Crozier, Bruce	McMeekin, Ted	Smith, Monique
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Takhar, Harinder S.
Dhillon, Vic	Meilleur, Madeleine	Van Bommel, Maria
Di Cocco, Caroline	Milloy, John	Wilkinson, John
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mitchell, Carol	Wong, Tony C.
Duguid, Brad	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duncan, Dwight	Oraziotti, David	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 15; the nays are 60.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion to amend lost.

The doors will now be opened for 30 seconds before taking the vote on the main motion.

We will now deal with the main motion by Mr. Bradley: "That the Legislative Assembly adopt the report of the Integrity Commissioner dated January 4, 2006, and approve the recommendation contained therein."

All those in favour will please rise one at a time.

Ayes

Arthurs, Wayne	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Patten, Richard
Balkissoon, Bas	Fonseca, Peter	Peters, Steve
Bartolucci, Rick	Gerretsen, John	Peterson, Tim
Bentley, Christopher	Hoy, Pat	Phillips, Gerry
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jeffrey, Linda	Pupatello, Sandra
Bradley, James J.	Kennedy, Gerard	Qaadri, Shafiq
Broten, Laurel C.	Kular, Kuldip	Racco, Mario G.
Bryant, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Ramal, Khalil
Cansfield, Donna H.	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramsay, David
Caplan, David	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	Levac, Dave	Ruprecht, Tony
Colle, Mike	Marsales, Judy	Sandals, Liz
Cordiano, Joseph	Matthews, Deborah	Smith, Monique
Craiton, Kim	McMeekin, Ted	Takhar, Harinder S.
Crozier, Bruce	McNeely, Phil	Van Bommel, Maria
Delaney, Bob	Meilleur, Madeleine	Wilkinson, John
Dhillon, Vic	Milloy, John	Wong, Tony C.
Di Cocco, Caroline	Mitchell, Carol	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	Oraziotti, David	
Duncan, Dwight	Parsons, Ernie	

The Acting Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time.

Nays

Amott, Ted	Marchese, Rosario	Scott, Laurie
Chudleigh, Ted	Martel, Shelley	Sterling, Norman W.
Hampton, Howard	Miller, Norm	Tory, John
Horwath, Andrea	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Kormos, Peter	Runciman, Robert W.	Yakabuski, John

The Clerk of the Assembly: The ayes are 61; the nays are 15.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the main motion carried.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 1, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I want to put a few comments on the record this afternoon.

We saw earlier the government contend that this bill is perfect and that it should be just whistled through the

House without any further debate. I am here to tell the government in no uncertain terms, your bill is not perfect. It has been an insult to First Nations across this province in its process. It was an insult to First Nations across this province in terms of your refusal to recognize the legitimate interests, the legitimate concerns, of aboriginal people with respect to their children.

This government's attempt today to whistle this legislation through the House without any further debate shows further contempt by the McGuinty government for the aboriginal people of Ontario and for the seriousness with which aboriginal people came to this Legislature to tell the McGuinty government over and over again that you are not respecting aboriginal legal rights, you are not respecting aboriginal treaty rights, you are not respecting aboriginal constitutional rights—further contempt shown by the McGuinty government today.

I want to be absolutely clear about what transpired over the last year. A year ago, with much fanfare, with much self-congratulation, the McGuinty government said, "The McGuinty government announces a new approach to aboriginal relationships to build stronger aboriginal communities." My, the press releases flew everywhere, and there were photo ops. The McGuinty government couldn't say enough about how they were going to consult with First Nations, how they were going to work with First Nations, how the McGuinty government really cared about aboriginal people, how the McGuinty government was going to pay attention to the issues raised by aboriginal people. That was a year ago, with much fanfare, much self-congratulation, many photo ops.

1610

Then the McGuinty government introduced Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act, and do you know what? The McGuinty government hadn't even talked to aboriginal people, hadn't even talked to the chiefs, hadn't even talked to the leadership of aboriginal organizations in the province. That in itself was bad enough, but when you read some of the things the McGuinty government was proposing in Bill 210—extremely prejudicial to aboriginal families, extremely prejudicial to aboriginal children and extremely destructive of what aboriginal people have been able to do over the last 30 years in terms of actually getting something positive done, in terms of the care and the welfare of aboriginal children—it would have given itself the unilateral authority to in effect either terminate customary care or unilaterally make very radical changes to customary care. What is customary care? Customary care is a kind of child protection, child welfare, that has been designed by aboriginal people with their social and cultural realities in mind. Yet the McGuinty government, after promising to consult and work with aboriginal families, aboriginal leadership, would have given itself the unilateral power to literally say, "Customary care is gone," or "The McGuinty government says that customary care shall mean thus and so, here and now." The arrogance of the McGuinty government, and the contempt the

McGuinty government showed for aboriginal people, and which they tried again here today, earlier this afternoon, to whistle this legislation through without giving anyone the opportunity to speak again, and how contemptuous this legislation has been in respect of aboriginal people; how contemptuous the McGuinty government has been in respect of aboriginal people. I want to put that on the record. I want to be very clear about the contempt this government has shown for aboriginal people in the way it originally proceeded and in the way it tried to proceed here this afternoon.

After the McGuinty government introduced the legislation and after again, with much self-congratulation, photo ops and the flourish of trumpets, pronouncing that it was going to do wonderful things—perhaps for some, but not for aboriginal people—the leadership of aboriginal communities came here to Queen's Park to raise their issues.

Once again, to talk about process, just before Christmas the McGuinty government tried to limit public hearings so that aboriginal communities, aboriginal leadership, would not be able to address this legislation. They tried literally to shut down debate, tried to shut down the committee process so that once again aboriginal people would be shut out. It was only through the protest of aboriginal organizations and, frankly, through the protest of New Democrats here at Queen's Park that aboriginal communities and the aboriginal leadership even got a hearing, even got to attend the public hearings and make their case, but when they finally got that—and I want to read the list, because this reflects the anger, the frustration and the concern of aboriginal communities across the province:

The Anishinaabe Abinoojii Family Services came, Aroland First Nation, Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, the Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing, the Anishinabek Nation, the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario, the Aundeck-Omni-Kaning First Nation, Beausoleil First Nation, Chiefs Committee on Child Welfare, Chippewas of Georgina Island, Curve Lake First Nation, Chippewas of Nawas First Nation, Chiefs of Ontario, Children in Limbo Taskforce of the Sparrow Lake Alliance, Chippewas of Nawash, Chiefs of Ontario, Council of Three Fires, Delaware Nation Council, Dokis First Nation, Eabametoong First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River Child and Family Services, Garden River First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Iskatewizaagegan No. 39 Independent First Nation, Kina Gbezhgomi Child and Family Services, London District Chiefs Council, Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation, Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, M'Chigeeng First Nation, Michipicoten First Nation, Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, Mnjikaning First Nation, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Nog-da-win-da-min Child and Family Services, Naotamegwaning First Nation, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Red Rock Band, Scugog First Nation, Sandpoint First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, Tikinagan Child and Family Services, Temagami First Nation,

Wahgogshig First Nation, Wahnapiatae First Nation, Webequie First Nation, Weech-it-te-win Family Services, Whitefish Lake First Nation, Wabigoon Lake First Nation, Whitefish River First Nation, Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve, Zhiibaahaasing First Nation.

All of these aboriginal organizations came forward to condemn the McGuinty government for not living up to their own promise, to work with First Nations, to respect aboriginal treaty and aboriginal rights, to respect aboriginal constitutional rights. They condemn this government for failing to live up to the recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions which establish that provincial governments must consult.

So we're here today not because the McGuinty government came up with great legislation. We're here today because First Nations came here like I've never seen them come here before, to tell the McGuinty government how outrageous their behaviour was, how contemptuous their behaviour was. So the McGuinty government was forced to listen.

The McGuinty government would once again have us believe that everything is wonderful now. Well, I want to read a recent resolution on First Nation child welfare. This is a resolution recently passed by the Association of Chiefs of Ontario:

"Whereas the inherent right to self-government includes jurisdiction in relation to the protection of First Nations children;

"Whereas Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act, abrogates the responsibilities of both the federal and provincial governments;

"Whereas the chiefs in assembly, through AOCC resolutions 05/22 and 05/27, opposed and rejected Bill 210 in its entirety and, in particular, a provision that would permit the Ontario government to arbitrarily redefine First Nation customary care practices in the vital area of child welfare;

"Whereas AOCC resolution 05/22 mandated the creation of a Chiefs Committee on Child Welfare to address and advance First Nations authority and jurisdiction in child welfare;

"Whereas AOCC resolution 05/27 directed the development of a separate consultation process to review and provide recommendations on the proposed legislative amendments to the Child and Family Services Act;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the chiefs in assembly, acknowledge the progress made to date by the Chiefs Committee on Child Welfare, the social services coordination unit and the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies...;

"Further be it resolved that we acknowledge the minimal amendments to Bill 210 as an interim measure...."

What the chiefs are saying is, while the McGuinty Liberals want to force this legislation through this afternoon, while the McGuinty Liberals want to pretend that everything has been fixed, the chiefs are saying that no, it hasn't been fixed. All the McGuinty government has done is put in minimal amendments.

1620

I'm here today to say this: The whole process around this bill was disgraceful. The whole process by the McGuinty government around this bill was disgraceful in terms of aboriginal people, and the only thing that has been done so far is to put forward minimal changes. The onus is on the McGuinty government now to actually live up to the promises you made in terms of working with aboriginal people and respecting the rights of aboriginal people instead of showing the contempt that you showed earlier and that you showed again here today in your attempt to whistle this bill through the House without further debate.

My colleague the member for Niagara, I believe, has some comments that he would like to make, and I think there is an agreement that he and I are sharing the time.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): It's pretty outrageous that the minister would stand in this House today and somehow suggest that anybody's been delaying anything around here when it's been the intransigence of the Minister of Transportation, Harinder Takhar, that has delayed the passage of a whole lot of bills: Bill 14, Bill 53, Bill 56, just for starters. If there are people out there, if there are folks out there concerned about legislation that didn't weave its way through the legislative process, call the Premier and call Mr. Takhar and find out why his personal interests were put ahead of the public interest, his interest in covering his butt when he got caught with his hands in the cookie jar. He let those interests override broader public interest.

To speak to Bill 210, look, Mr. Hampton has put it very clearly. The bill has been tinkered with, but only marginally so, and there are a whole lot of gaping holes left in this legislation—a whole lot. I find it offensive, and so should folks out there, that somehow the minister would want a bill to be passed without thorough consideration. I'm the last speaker for the New Democrats on this matter, so I'm going to be here for the balance of the day participating in 10 minutes of questions and comments on other speakers.

You heard me before when I applauded the incredibly diligent work of Sheila Volchert from down in Pelham. Ms. Volchert is one of those grandparents raising grandchildren here in the province of Ontario, and Ms. Volchert and others like her have been lobbying successive governments for a number of changes. One of them has been the open adoption regime which is proposed in this bill. Let's not kid ourselves. The open adoption proposal, at the end of the day, is designed to get natural parents to collaborate in the adoption of grandchildren by their grandparents when those natural parents have demonstrated an inability to adequately care for their children. The real issue isn't open adoption. The real issue is the need for clear legislation, critical legislation that directs courts, family courts, family judges in this province to pull parental rights when a parent has put a child in danger over a period of time, when a parent, as a result of drunkenness or drug addiction or other misconduct, inability, misbehaviour—because you know darned well

what happens, Speaker, and other folks here have had the experience too. Kids get put into foster care with good foster homes and then the parent comes back and says, "I'm ready now to take care of my kid again." The kids get pulled out of the foster homes. The parent screws up again, falls off the wagon, gets back on the booze, gets back on the crack cocaine, gets back on to the streets. Children's aid moves and puts the kids in another foster home, with good foster parents, foster parents who develop a bond with those children—or with grandparents, and grandparents have been frustrated for far too long in getting fast-tracked in terms of having custody of their grandchildren, when those are loving, caring grandparents, the natural family of that child, who should be the first choice as custodial parents.

So while we support open adoption, let's call it what it is and see it for what it is. It's a mere surrogate for the implementation of effective legislation that will give judges the authority, the power, to pull parental rights promptly when you've got a drug-addicted or alcoholic or abusive parent who is going to cause that kid to ping-pong back and forth.

I also told you that I have serious concerns about the manner in which the government incorporates mediation into disputes around child protection. You've heard me say before, and I'm going to say it again, that it was Professor Fiss—and I quote him—who talks about alternative dispute resolution in the context of certain types of litigation. He says, "It should be treated instead as a highly problematic technique for streamlining dockets." My fear is that the mediation proposed in this legislation has as its primary goal the relief of pressure on our family courts that have dockets as long as your arm and family court judges and court staff who are working 10-, 11-, 12-hour days and being forced to make decisions in a sausage-factory manner.

I don't know whether or not this bill is going to finish debate today. But I find it offensive for there to be some sort of arrogant proposition by government members that somehow a bill shouldn't get debate because that particular minister wants it passed then, there and now. There is a process here. I expect government members to stand up with their analysis of this bill and explain why they think it's ready for passage. I similarly expect other opposition members, because it's their job, to stand up with their analysis of this bill and explain why they continue to have concerns about it. You don't get a whole lot of kicks at the can around here. This is not going to be re-addressed real soon.

We appreciate that Andrea Horwath worked as hard as anybody could, with great skill and professionalism, in the committee hearings and presented a number of amendments, one of them being oversight by the Ombudsman. Why would the government vote down oversight by the Ombudsman? What are they afraid of? That is so fundamental.

I say, should there be any mention of this bill not having been called earlier, let the government House leader explain why he didn't call it, and let Mr. Takhar

explain why his stubbornness, his selfishness, his pure self-interest prevented not only this bill but a number of pieces of legislation from having the debate they deserved during the course of this three-week session.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): This is a bill that provides for permanency planning for children in the care of children's aid societies, provides for accountability and recognizes the unique needs of our First Nations children. But this is a bill not for this government, not for this party; this is a bill for the children of Ontario. The children of Ontario we're talking about are, by and large, in foster homes, and they're in good foster homes. But for a number of reasons they're not going to remain there for their life, or their foster parents and foster families have to quit fostering. I want to tell you about the effect on these children of living in limbo in a foster home.

They have already been physically removed from their birth parents, and rightfully so. But now they face the trauma every day of, when a car comes in, is that car coming to get them and move them? They have difficulty sleeping. They have difficulty doing well in school because they're in limbo. If you left here, not knowing where you are going to live tonight, you would understand that.

For each move they leave their school, they leave their friends and they lose friendships they've built. They're already traumatized while they try to make new friends. What you may not have thought of is that they lose the pets they've established a bond with in the foster home. They view the foster parents' relatives as their relatives, and suddenly that's all taken away. That is a feeling of rejection for them. Even if they've done nothing wrong, they feel rejected when they have to move again.

What foster children in this province need is a sense of permanence, a sense of being part of a family, of having some worth. This bill provides for that to happen, whether it be faster through adoptive parents, kinship or friends or perhaps even permanency in the foster home.

I beg and plead to the opposition: Do not play games. This is a bill that would profoundly improve the quality of life for our children

1630

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): The opposition parties are not playing games in this Legislature when they do their job, which is to debate legislation and come forward with ideas that may have been brought to our attention. This afternoon, we're debating an important issue. I don't think anyone would doubt the sincerity of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in bringing forward Bill 210. For my part, as a member of the Legislature who was able to participate for a few days during the public hearings and the clause-by-clause discussion of the bill, I would say that it's one I support in principle and I'm hopeful it will pass into law.

It was unfortunate that the government used two of their staged questions during question period this after-

noon to ask questions of the Minister of Children and Youth Services in an attempt to suggest it's the opposition's fault that this bill may not pass today. Let's face it, the government House leader can call a bill that's before the House at any time. To heap scorn and blame on the opposition when the Legislature is sitting for three weeks and this winter session is coming to a close—we're getting to a point where we're getting down to brass tacks. There's still an opportunity if the House leaders want to meet to discuss the issues that apparently have created this impasse, but certainly the opposition parties have good reason to express concern about the way the Integrity Commissioner's report was handled and the way the government seems to be attempting to sweep under the carpet the condemnation of this Minister of Transportation that was represented in the Integrity Commissioner's report and to hope that it will go away.

But it's not going to go away and it can't go away. The opposition parties have an absolute responsibility to continue to raise this issue. We've no choice, because this is the first time in the history of the province that the Integrity Commissioner has written a report such as he did, condemning a minister, and the Premier of the day is refusing to admit that his minister has been condemned by the Integrity Commissioner. He is refusing to act upon it in the appropriate way, which is to ask the minister to step aside and appoint a new Minister of Transportation so that the integrity of this place is upheld.

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I think the member from Prince Edward-Hastings should be a bit careful with his remarks. The remarks around the issue of playing games are hurtful, if not dismissive, of the comments that people have made here. You've heard—

Interjection.

Mr. Marchese: Perhaps you didn't mean it; I'm not quite sure. Or other members maybe don't mean it; I'm not quite sure.

But you've heard the member from Kenora-Rainy River speak passionately about the issue of aboriginal people. He's not playing games when he says aboriginal people were not informed and were not aware that this bill was before this Legislature and was about to go to hearings. They didn't know that hearings were going on and they didn't know that their lives, as it relates to the care of their children, were on the line. That's not playing games. That speaks to the issue the member from Kenora-Rainy River says is a key and important part of aboriginal people.

We thought you believed in those matters. We felt you believed that aboriginal people ought to be consulted, that you should not be abrogating your responsibility as it relates to aboriginal treaty rights, that even if the civil servants forgot, you would, as politicians, make certain they would be actively engaged and consulted before the bill was drafted so as to make sure their issues were taken care of, and not have my friend from Hamilton East have to bring forth amendments to make sure their rights were restored as it relates to children of aboriginal families. We had to bring amendments. The government should

have taken the care to have the appropriate language that addresses their issues. How can you say we're playing games with the issue? That's only one issue, as it relates to process and as it relates to aboriginal families and their children—one issue amongst many.

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I really feel compelled to say something today. I sat through many meetings with aboriginal leaders prior to the hearings, and if you listen to the members from the NDP, you'd believe they were the only ones who put forward amendments that would respect what the aboriginal leaders told us. I don't find that to be an accurate portrayal. We worked really hard with the NDP to put amendments in that were very similar. We allowed the NDP amendments to go forward. We have absolutely listened to the aboriginal leaders. We've tried to make this the best bill.

I feel absolutely confident that this is the type of legislation that aboriginal leaders and chiefs would want us to do. They asked for these specific amendments. We absolutely delivered. We're here with a good bill, one that is going to protect children for the foreseeable future. The last bill had unintended consequences. It had legislation in it that hurt children. We listened to what we heard at those hearings. We had young people come towards us. We had grandparents come forward and ask us to make changes that would affect their lives in the future. We listened to them. There are amendments here, and we struck out whole sections of the bill in order to meet what aboriginal leaders and chiefs told us would make a difference to their children. So if you hear today that we didn't listen, that is not the case; we absolutely did listen, and we put in legislation that we heard was necessary to respect the aboriginal community.

This is a good piece of legislation. Nothing could be further from the truth than that we didn't listen. We spent considerable days. In fact, we doubled the time that we could hear witnesses before our committee in order to accommodate what the aboriginal leaders said were tight time constraints. We listened. We heard them. There is nothing more important than our children. We have to make a decision. This affects people's families and lives. This government has brought forward a good piece of legislation. We should vote on it.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for a response. The Chair recognizes the leader of the third party.

Mr. Hampton: I want to comment and respond especially to the member for Prince Edward-Hastings, who suggests that if an opposition member dares bring up the fact that this legislation was grossly unfair and contemptuous of First Nations, somehow an opposition member is playing politics. There's only one organization that played politics with this bill today. The McGuinty government tried to play politics with it.

I want to respond, of course, to the member from Brampton Centre. I remember saying to the Premier, "Look, you've got major problems with this bill. It is contemptuous of First Nations. It is prejudicial to First Nations. Will you, instead of trying to force it through, withdraw it, hold it back, allow for a consultation with

First Nations?" Do you know what the response of Premier McGuinty was? "No. This bill is perfect."

The only reason this bill was amended was because First Nations had to come here to Queen's Park and tell you holier-than-thou members of the McGuinty government that you were not observing their constitutional rights, their treaty rights, their aboriginal rights, nor were you living up to the promises you made to aboriginal people. They had to come here en masse and tell you that because you were so holier-than-thou, you weren't going to listen.

So I say again that the only people who have played politics with this legislation are members of the McGuinty government, members of the McGuinty government who were so arrogant that they wouldn't listen to First Nations—who were so arrogant that even when they came here, you tried to shilly-shally around and avoid their legitimate issues. And still today you're playing politics with it, and you suggest that when somebody raises legitimate First Nations issues, they're playing politics. You are just as disgraceful today, sir.

1640

The Acting Speaker: Further debate? The Chair recognizes the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to participate.

Mr. Hampton: Disgusting; worse than disgusting: arrogance from the beginning and continuing today.

The Acting Speaker: Will the leader of the third party allow the member from Leeds–Grenville to debate this bill?

The Chair recognizes the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Runciman: I understand and share the anger of the leader of the third party with respect to what we saw in this House today. The House leader for the third party, Mr. Kormos, is here as well. I'm the House leader for the official opposition. What we saw today was, I think, a disgraceful show with respect to this bill, Bill 210.

Our party is supportive of the legislation. Over the past several weeks we have offered, as a party, encouragement to the government to call the bill, that we were prepared to support it, to see it passed. Instead, they did not do that. They left it until the end, when they knew our frustration and dissatisfaction with respect to the way they've dealt with the Takhar matter was boiling over. And then we see a disgraceful performance in this House today, misusing government backbench questions, and then the minister herself: a terribly embarrassing and shameful performance on her part, trying to blame the opposition for the fact that this bill has been delayed.

The reality is that there was a list of objectives that the government had when we first sat down as House leaders. We tried to work in a co-operative fashion; we're talking about three people who are veterans of this place, who don't like to play games. We have to do our job as members of the opposition in a responsible way, to make sure that the concerns of the public and organizations and groups are heard and expressed and, in some cases,

conveyed through amendments etc. That's the role that we, Her Majesty's loyal opposition, have to play. But we're not here to be obstructionist; we're here to do the good job that we were elected to do as opposition members. I think that's the way both the House leader for the third party and myself have approached this, and I believe that the House leader for the government has approached it in that manner.

They came with a list. We felt that much of that list could be accomplished in this brief three-week sitting, and that's the way we approached it. But if you take a look at what has happened, at what has caused the situation we're in today, where we cannot proceed with third reading of Bill 210 in terms of finalization, we wouldn't have been in this box if Mr. Takhar had done the right thing when the Integrity Commissioner tabled his report in this Legislature and had stepped down. An unprecedented rebuke of a cabinet minister—in the history of this province, unprecedented—but he had the gall not only to stay in that job but to stay here today and vote on his own report. He had the unmitigated gall to stay in here, smile through all of this, with no appreciation or recognition of the history behind this, the fact that he's the first minister ever to be reprimanded by the Integrity Commissioner for egregious and careless conduct.

The other party who's responsible here is Premier McGuinty. If he had respected the standards that he set for cabinet integrity when he was sitting over here as the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Takhar would not be in that job. We would not have been engaged in this debate. We could have worked productively to accomplish what was realistically accomplishable. But that didn't happen. Mr. Takhar didn't do the right thing. The Premier ignored his own standards, and has really, virtually—there are no standards anymore, as far as we're concerned, with respect to the ability to stay in cabinet.

That outlines why we are so frustrated, why we are so upset, and why Bill 210 is not proceeding. It's not the responsibility of the government or the opposition; it's the responsibility of Mr. Takhar, it's the responsibility of the government and it's the responsibility of all those people who played these shameless, shameless games with all of us here today.

On that note, I move adjournment of the debate.

The Acting Speaker: The member from Leeds–Grenville has moved adjournment of the debate. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1645 to 1715.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 5; the nays are 38.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

To continue the debate, the Chair recognizes the member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Runciman: I appreciate the opportunity once again to participate in the debate around Bill 210, legislation which the Progressive Conservative Party is supportive of, and we've indicated that on a number of occasions now.

There were concerns surrounding the legislation, and certainly you've heard some today from the leader of the third party, but the member for York North, Ms. Munro, who's our critic in this portfolio, has also expressed a number of reservations about the long-term implications of the legislation and whether indeed it will accomplish what it is purported to be drafted to accomplish. I think those concerns are very valid, very legitimate. The member for York North has, through the committee process, suggested that there should be a sunset clause incorporated into the legislation so that at the end of a five-year period, the impacts could be measured to see whether indeed it was accomplishing the goals that it set out to achieve or that the government set out to achieve, or whether it was creating serious problems. I know some of our members in the Progressive Conservative caucus have had some concerns as well about the implications, and what they believe are very serious implications.

In this caucus, the Progressive Conservative caucus, we're supportive of seeing this legislation receive third reading in this three-week sitting of the House. In fact, we indicated very early on, at the start of this process, this three-week sitting, that we were quite prepared to see the bill passed. For a variety of reasons, that hasn't happened. The government chose, for whatever reasons, not to pursue it on the basis of our advice, and we now find ourselves in a situation where, because of their failure to deal in an appropriate way with the Integrity Commissioner's recommendations related to Minister Takhar, we cannot allow this bill to pass at this point in time.

It's regrettable, but what is even more regrettable are the tactics that have been adopted by the members of the government with respect to this issue to try and blackmail us. I think that's an appropriate description of the approach they've taken today: efforts to intimidate us and suggest that we are somehow delaying this. In fact, the reality is that we could have dealt with a whole range of legislation, let alone Bill 210, if Minister Takhar had done the appropriate thing and stepped down in the wake of that report, an unprecedented report, an unprecedented condemnation in the history of this province of a minister of the crown by the Integrity Commissioner. But instead, he chose to sit tight, put his head down and go through this process—

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to standing order 23(b), the topic under discussion is Bill 210 and not the Integrity Commissioner's report.

The Acting Speaker: That's noted, and I would tell the member from Leeds–Grenville that we are discussing Bill 210.

Mr. Runciman: Mr. Speaker, I felt I was referencing Bill 210, explaining why the bill is not going to get third reading before we break.

The responsibility lies with the government. That's what we are talking about, Bill 210 and why it's not proceeding this evening past third reading, not because we don't agree with the legislation; we do. We support the legislation.

The reality is that Minister Takhar's lack of response to the Integrity Commissioner's report and the Premier's failure to meet the ethical standards he set as the Leader of the Opposition—in terms of standards for staying in cabinet, he has lowered the bar to the floor to allow this individual to remain in cabinet. That's why we are here this evening. That's why we are not in a position to proceed with Bill 210. As regrettable as that may be, the total responsibility for that lies at the feet of the Liberal government of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I move—

Mr. Delaney: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the member for Mississauga West.

Mr. Delaney: Mr. Speaker, the same point of order: Pursuant to standing order 23(b), the member for Leeds–Grenville is again addressing a matter already dealt with by the House, and not Bill 210, which is the topic under discussion.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Runciman: I move adjournment of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 30-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1723 to 1753.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour, please rise.

All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly: The ayes are 3; the nays are 34.

The Acting Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Further debate?

Mr. Arnott: I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate on Bill 210 for a few moments. I realize that in about three minutes the House will adjourn and this special winter sitting of the Ontario Legislature will conclude. I'm disappointed that, unfortunately, there was an unwillingness on the part of the government to accept the points that were being made in a united way by the opposition parties on the issue of the Integrity Commissioner and his report to the Legislature—the government's absolute unwillingness to accept the recommendation that was made by the Integrity Commissioner, the censure of the Minister of Transportation that was included in that report and the government's unwillingness to respond in the appropriate way, which would have been, of course, to seek the resignation

of the Minister of Transportation. So we are talking today about the lack of ethical standards that the government is demonstrating. As a result of that, unfortunately, Bill 210 is not going to be brought to a vote this afternoon.

Of course, it was very disappointing this afternoon during question period when a couple of the government members, who had an opportunity to bring forward important issues on behalf of their constituents, instead chose to try to cast aspersions on the opposition and to heap scorn and blame on the opposition parties when in fact every member of this Legislature knows full well that it's the responsibility of the government House leader to call legislation for debate. Certainly, the government House leader over the last three weeks has had ample opportunity to call this. It's our understanding from the report we've received from our House leader that he indicated some time ago that we were willing to pass this legislation, but unfortunately, the bill was not called for third reading debate until recently and was left till the very end.

It's most unfortunate that this bill, which I think most of the members of this House, if not all of us, in the end will support, is not going to pass. It's most unfortunate that the House leaders, when given a couple of opportunities over the course of the afternoon, were unable to come to an agreement. It's most unfortunate that the government is unwilling to—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Pursuant to standing order 37, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

GROVES MEMORIAL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): The member for Waterloo–Wellington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Health. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I can't begin my presentation this evening by saying that I'm glad to have this chance to speak in this House, because I would have preferred to have received a reasonable answer to my question yesterday to the Premier, which in the end was answered by the Minister of Health. If a reasonable answer would have been forthcoming, we would not be here right now winding up this special winter sitting of the Ontario Legislature, as the last order of business, talking about the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus.

As you know, the standing orders of the Legislature provide opposition MPPs with an opportunity to register their dissatisfaction with an answer given in question period by requesting what we call a late show. A late

show is a brief debate of up to 10 minutes where the issue can be discussed again in a fulsome way outside of the heated environment of question period.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, in the past, I have rarely asked for late shows, and I do not request them lightly. But yesterday, I once again raised a very serious issue, that being the need for the redevelopment of the Groves Memorial Community Hospital in Fergus. In response, the Minister of Health was absolutely dismissive of the concern which exists in Waterloo–Wellington, the fact that we've been waiting now for two years for approval from the Ministry of Health to move forward to the next stage of planning.

In my question, I asked the Premier why it has taken his government two years to grant us permission to move forward to proceed with this needed hospital redevelopment planning. I put the question to the Premier because, on Tuesday of this week, I raised the issue with him in a private conversation. I hand-delivered to him a letter asking for his personal intervention to direct the Minister of Health to give the necessary approval to our hospital. I approached him because I've been raising this issue with the minister for two years, and my patience, quite frankly, has worn out. The Premier appeared to be genuinely interested in this issue, and I know that he's familiar with our area.

Having said that, I was somewhat disappointed when the Premier referred the question back to the Minister of Health. Here's what the Minister of Health said in response to a serious health care question affecting my constituents in Waterloo–Wellington. I quote from Hansard:

"If the honourable member speaks to the person to his left, Mr. Garfield Dunlop, he will find out about a hospital project ... being completed and about a new MRI. If he speaks to the gentleman in front of him, he'll hear about a new project in Almonte. If he goes one to the left, he'll hear about a project in Richmond Hill. If he goes forward and two to the left, he'll hear of a project in Kitchener. If he goes two to his left, he'll hear about a project in Newmarket. If he goes one back and to his left, he'll hear about progress in Cambridge. If he goes over to the member from Oshawa, he'll hear about the new regional cancer centre that's coming to life. If he goes to talk to the member for Renfrew, he'll hear about the project in Arnprior."

1800

Mr. Speaker, while I'm incapable of recapturing the histrionic manner in which the minister conveyed that answer to the House, I think you'll agree that nothing in it conveyed any reference to my constituents in Waterloo–Wellington. It was simply a partisan rant.

Any description of the hospital where I was born almost 43 years ago and where our three sons were born best begins with the hospital's vision statement: "Our vision at Groves Memorial Community Hospital is to be a leader in the provision of excellent, compassionate, rural health care."

Caring, accountability, respect, excellence and integrity are the values which animate the highest-quality

health care that the staff at Groves deliver each and every day of the year. In fact, if you ask my constituents in Centre Wellington to rate the quality of health care in our province, they will say it is very good to excellent because of our hospital.

When the staff at Groves determined that it was time to begin planning for a redeveloped hospital to meet the future health care needs of our growing community, our foundation and many volunteers went to work raising the funds needed to pay for our share of the project. Close to \$15 million was raised in a short period of time. Such is the support our community demonstrated for the hospital and for the project: digging deep to plan for the future.

The Groves Memorial Community Hospital is a 103-year-old hospital in a facility that has 53-year-old, 43-year-old and 28-year-old wings. The redevelopment project would mean major renovations and modest new construction to bring the facility up to current standards, enhance existing services, and position the hospital to accommodate the future needs of the growing and aging population in our catchment area, which reaches beyond the boundaries of Centre Wellington. Our redeveloped hospital will also help us to build on our successful health professional recruitment and retention initiatives.

I've served in the Legislature for a long time, and I expect the government knows that if there's a problem in my riding, I will continue to raise it persistently and repeatedly until it's resolved to the satisfaction of my constituents. They deserve no less from their member—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I'm delighted to respond to the member's concerns today on behalf of the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

The member for Waterloo–Wellington spoke of his dissatisfaction with the response from the minister, but he failed to actually repeat his question for this House, which began with, "I hope there isn't a pattern emerging here whereby ridings held by government members have their hospital development approvals fast-tracked, and communities that are represented by opposition MPPs are at the back of the line."

That is how he began his question, and in response to that, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care rightfully cited a number of projects, in ridings held by members of all parties, that are moving forward. There are projects in Lanark–Carleton, in Kitchener–Waterloo, in Oshawa, in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke that are moving forward. These are not government ridings; these are opposition ridings.

As Minister Caplan, our Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, has pointed out on a number of occasions, our government inherited an infrastructure deficit estimated at \$100 billion. We are moving forward with a number of projects to address that deficit. The Ontario Hospital Association estimates that the amount needed for hospitals alone is \$8 billion. Through ReNew Ontario, our government is starting to overturn years of costly neglect of previous governments. While previous governments over-promised and underdelivered, we are

investing \$5 billion in health care infrastructure. The new investment includes funding for 105 hospital projects. This is a very significant commitment.

The previous government was notorious for its rubber cheque presentations, and my community has been the recipient of some of those rubber cheques as well. There's a lovely photo prominently displayed in the North Bay General Hospital of the former Premier, Mike Harris, the member for Nipissing at that time, presenting a rubber cheque to the North Bay General Hospital Foundation and announcing that our hospital was going ahead. The photo is dated, I believe, 1997 or 1998, and there was a completion date of 2006. We don't have shovels in the ground in North Bay yet and we had the Premier as our representative. He was unable to move forward with our hospital project. There are a number of projects that haven't been going forward, and there are a number of frustrated communities. I recognize that. Our project, happily, is moving forward. Our community is delighted to see it moving forward.

However, at the other end of my riding we have the town of Mattawa. Many in this chamber are familiar with the town of Mattawa. Its hospital burned down in 1967. The people of Mattawa have been dealing with a hospital in portables since 1967. For 21 years they had as their representative Mr. Harris, the member for Nipissing and the Premier of the province, and he was unable to provide them with a new hospital. They are still waiting.

I share the frustration of the member from Waterloo–Wellington because I have a community that is also waiting. Unfortunately, the previous government left us with a huge deficit, as well as a huge infrastructure deficit. We as a government are trying to deal with that. The leader of the official opposition has acknowledged that, and I quote: "No government should say the cheque is in anyone's back pocket," said Mr. Tory, the leader of the official opposition during a visit to Cornwall. "That shouldn't be the sort of thing any government member goes around saying before an election."

Mr. Ted Chudleigh (Halton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: The member is referring to—

The Acting Speaker: There are no points of order during this part of the proceedings. Thank you.

Ms. Smith: I did refer to him as the leader of the official opposition. He's also the member for Dufferin–Peel–Wellington–Grey.

As well, I would like to note a quote from Mr. Harde-man, who spoke of his community, saying that while he was "not disagreeing that there was not enough money to pay for all the approved projects, Woodstock General Hospital was not one of them"—again, a member of the previous government acknowledging that the commitments that were made by that government were not covered by sufficient funding.

There is much frustration in many communities, but we are doing our best and moving forward in an unprecedented investment in infrastructure across the province and an unprecedented investment in health infrastructure.

To deal specifically with Groves Memorial hospital, we've seen some major investment made in that hospital in the last three years. Over the term of our government we've seen a \$1.7-million increase in operational funding, \$784,000 invested in diagnostic medical equipment, and a more than \$500,000 increase in annual base funding. We've seen \$60,000 in full-time nursing positions.

Our government has invested almost \$3.5 million in new money in Groves Memorial hospital since taking office. To state that we've forgotten that hospital is a

misstatement. We are committed to improving health infrastructure across the province and we are doing so.

The Acting Speaker: I want to thank the member from Waterloo–Wellington and the member from Nipissing.

There being no further matters to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, March 27, 2006.

The House adjourned at 1808.

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

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Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford	Tascona, Joseph N. (PC) Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Halton	Chudleigh, Ted (PC)
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Bramalea-Gore-Malton- Springdale	Kular, Kuldip (L)	Hamilton Mountain	Bountrogianni, Hon. / L'hon. Marie (L) Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal / ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales, ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
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Brant	Levac, Dave (L)	Huron-Bruce	Mitchell, Carol (L)
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Kenora-Rainy River	Hampton, Howard (ND) Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Burlington	Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L) Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Cambridge	Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Milloy, John (L)
Chatham-Kent Essex	Hoy, Pat (L)	Kitchener-Waterloo	Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)
Davenport	Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Lambton-Kent-Middlesex	Van Bommel, Maria (L)
Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement	Lanark-Carleton	Sterling, Norman W. (PC)
Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Wynne, Kathleen O. (L)	Leeds-Grenville	Runciman, Robert W. (PC)
Dufferin-Peel- Wellington-Grey	Tory, John (PC) Leader of the Opposition / chef de l'opposition	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Matthews, Deborah (L)
Durham	O'Toole, John (PC)	London West / London-Ouest	Bentley, Hon. / L'hon. Christopher (L) Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Eglinton-Lawrence	Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L) Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration	London-Fanshawe	Ramal, Khalil (L)
Elgin-Middlesex-London	Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L) Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail	Markham	Wong, Tony C. (L)
Erie-Lincoln	Hudak, Tim (PC)	Mississauga Centre / Mississauga-Centre	Takhar, Hon. / L'hon. Harinder S. (L) Minister of Transportation / ministre des Transports
Essex	Crozier, Bruce (L) Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Vice-Président, Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Fonseca, Peter (L)
Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L) Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
Etobicoke-Lakeshore	Brotten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L) Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	Kormos, Peter (ND)
Glangarry-Prescott-Russell	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
Guelph-Wellington	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Greg (L)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
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Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Nepean–Carleton	Vacant
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Toronto–Danforth	Vacant
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Whitby–Ajax	Vacant
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse		
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)		
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux		
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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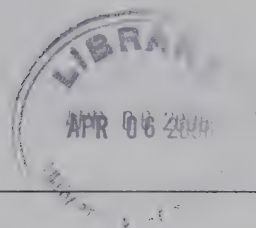
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No. 48

N° 48

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Thursday 23 March 2006

Jeudi 23 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 23 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 23 mars 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The member for Waterloo—Wellington.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo—Wellington): Welcome back, Mr. Speaker.

Last year, in my newsletter to my constituents in Waterloo—Wellington, I included a questionnaire. The most decisive response I received on any questions was 90% support for my private member's bill that is intended to protect double-hatter firefighters. My constituents understand that this issue has the potential to put rural communities at risk when firefighters are harassed by their union and forced to quit volunteering in their home communities.

The fire marshal understands this too. A few months ago in Shakespeare, two double-hatter firefighters were forced by their union to sit at home while a neighbour's home was ablaze. That house sustained considerable damage, and a family pet died in the fire. After the incident and his investigation, Fire Marshal Bernard Moyle wrote to the Stratford Beacon Herald, saying that his office will continue to support legislation to protect double-hatters.

Recently, Ted Droog, president of the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario, wrote to the Premier urging him to support my bill, saying, "It will accomplish and ensure justice, fairness and protection to career firefighters from losing their employment and permit them to be a volunteer firefighter in their home community."

This week, the Kitchener-Waterloo Record published an opinion column by Teresa Brown. She wrote that without double-hatter firefighters, "rural townships would not enjoy the high-quality fire service they now have. In fact, Ontario would essentially have two-tiered fire protection, one for the wealthier municipalities and a vastly different one for poorer rural areas."

So far, the government has refused to express support for double-hatters in any meaningful way—

The Speaker: Thank you. Be seated. Thank you.

EMERGENCY SERVICES SERVICES D'URGENCE

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): I rise today to acknowledge and honour the

bravery of the firefighters and rescue workers who responded to the tragic accident involving 38 cars and killing five people on Highway 417 near Limoges on February 17. Led by Fire Chief Aurèle Constantineau, fire departments from Embrun, Limoges and Ottawa worked alongside paramedics from Prescott and Russell, and Ottawa, and the OPP.

About 90 emergency personnel worked for over 20 hours to evacuate the injured and clear the road.

OC Transpo a fourni le transport des gens légèrement blessés à la station des pompiers de Limoges, où les gens de la communauté leur ont servi un goûter chaud pendant qu'ils attendaient leurs parents ou leurs amis.

Samedi prochain, le 25 mars, le Service d'incendie de la municipalité de La Nation, caserne Limoges, célébrera son 30^e anniversaire de fondation. Trois pompiers de la caserne seront honorés pour leur contribution et leurs décennies de service : Timmy Tolsma, 20 ans de service; Guy Longtin, 30 ans de service; et le Chef Aurèle Constantineau, 30 ans de service.

Au nom du gouvernement McGuinty, félicitations à nos trois récipiendaires ainsi qu'à ceux et celles qui ont contribué au succès des services rendus à la communauté.

WEARING OF BUTTONS

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I seek unanimous consent for members to wear the "Farmers Feed Cities" button in support of agriculture.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

COURT SECURITY

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound): I rise in the House today to express my frustration and that of the council of the city of Owen Sound over the lack of action, promised by this Liberal government. I'm referring to the dispute over who should pay for court security costs and the refusal by the minister to resolve it. He has stated, and I quote from a letter sent in August 2005 to the city of Owen Sound, "It has always been my position that municipalities with regional court security obligations should not have to pay the full amount of court security costs."

On another occasion he stated, "The current state of affairs, where the provision of court security is the sole responsibility of the local municipality that houses court facilities, is untenable."

Court security costs for 2006 are estimated to reach \$500,000, and with only half of the cases heard occurring in the city of Owen Sound, why is Owen Sound paying all the costs? Why doesn't the minister step up and resolve this inequity?

Not only have I written letters and arranged and attended meetings, I also participated in a forum in Owen Sound last June. The 2003 Hugh Thomas report recommended that either the province pay the bill or municipalities share the costs willingly, or the province would legislate cost sharing. This government chose to ignore that report and, as reported this past February in our local newspaper, the minister "has no intention of helping the city deal with the contentious court security cost issue."

Another 20 municipalities experiencing the same problem have joined our fight, and still this government refuses to act. The studies—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

AGNES MACPHAIL

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): I rise today to talk about Agnes Macphail. As the members of this Legislature walk up the grand staircase to come into this Legislature, they will see that there are eight or nine busts of prominent parliamentarians, and only one of those busts is of a woman. That is Agnes Campbell Macphail, who was the first woman to take her seat in this Legislature—the first one—in 1943.

Tomorrow, 24 March, marks her birthday, and in great tradition the former borough of East York, now part of the city of Toronto, marks that occasion for the 13th straight year by giving an Agnes Macphail Award to the person in the community who best epitomizes all of those great social causes that she stood for, not only in Ottawa but in this Legislature—causes like women, causes like poverty and causes like penal reform. We honour a citizen once a year, and will do so tomorrow night in the same tradition, because in East York that part of us is still very much alive.

At 7:30 tomorrow night—and we invite the people from Grey-Bruce to come down too—we will award this year's recipient, the person who has best done what is necessary for our community in the great spirit of Agnes Macphail. We invite people to come to the East York Civic Centre at 850 Coxwell Avenue and honour the new recipient of this year's award.

1340

ROB MacISAAC

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot): Exactly three weeks ago today, residents of the Burlington-Hamilton area awoke to the startling news that their beloved mayor, Rob MacIsaac, would not be a candidate in the next municipal election.

Members of this assembly will know of His Worship's work with the provincial Smart Growth panel, and more recently, as chairman of our government's greenbelt

initiative. When it comes to building a strong community or a strong Ontario, the mayor has always been generous with his time and expertise. Mayor Rob has understood as well as any person I have ever met that decisions should be directed by reason, supported by principle and designed to achieve the greatest good.

The people of Burlington know their mayor as a straight-up, thoughtful, progressive and pragmatic visionary. The truth put, his simple decency and integrity have earned the widespread admiration and respect of all who know or have worked with him.

I understand why my good friend is temporarily leaving elected public office. He needs a break and wants to spend more time with his lovely wife, Anne, and their two charming daughters, Sarah and Catherine. We'll miss him and hope to see a return to public life soon. That said, I'm sure all members of this assembly would want to join me in expressing thanks to Mayor Rob for his wonderful years of service and wishing him all the very best in the years ahead.

CHILDREN'S TREATMENT CENTRES

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener—Waterloo): There is a health care crisis in this province as 9,000 children wait for services from 19 children's treatment centres.

More than 1,000 of these children are served by KidsAbility in Waterloo region and Wellington county. These children with special needs are being forced to wait an average of nine months, and up to 24 months. These children include those who need therapy to learn to walk or talk, premature babies who need therapy to develop normally, preschoolers who need support and therapy to be successful in school, and children with complex conditions such as autism.

These long, unfair wait times penalize our young children with disabilities and jeopardize their future in school and in life. They also place an expensive and unfair burden on our schools and undue stress on families. Research from Dr. Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain tells us that early intervention from conception to age six is vitally important to enable these children to achieve their full potential.

On behalf of all of these children and their families, I call upon the Liberal government to immediately provide \$2.2 million to KidsAbility to eliminate the long wait times, as well as funding to all children's treatment centres in Ontario to eliminate their existing wait lists.

DIALYSIS

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): I would like to describe for you a room that I visited yesterday. It had enormous picture windows with a lovely view of evergreens. The walls were tastefully done in the richest tones of cornflower blue and pale bisque. The artwork on the walls was engaging. The capacious reclining chairs enveloped you in comfort. And the telephone, television

set and Internet were conveniently placed at one's fingertips—no need to move an inch, which is a good thing, because once seated in those chairs, you are not allowed to move for several hours. That is how long it usually takes for the kidney dialysis machine to work its life-saving magic.

I have just described for you, not a luxury hotel room, but the newest kidney dialysis satellite centre, located in my riding at St. Joseph's centre for ambulatory care.

It is Kidney Health Month. It wasn't that many decades ago that dialysis and transplants were in their infancy, and making the three- or four-times-weekly trek to a hospital that might not have been that handy to sit hooked up to a noisy machine for hours on end was an ordeal to be endured. For decades, dialysis has been making the difference between life and death, but what I saw yesterday makes the difference between quality of life and mere survival.

This year, our government has put an additional \$30 million into chronic kidney disease services, with an emphasis on making dialysis more accessible and providing more in-home care. This is a dollar-wise investment that better promotes health and well-being and soothes and nurtures a body and soul engaged in a battle for survival.

VOLUNTEERS

BÉNÉVOLES

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): When we think about the March break and what it means to our youth, we normally think of young people vacationing, spending time with friends, skiing, snowboarding, or even escaping to a beach. What we don't think of is youth selflessly devoting their time to serving the less fortunate in countries like Jamaica or the Dominican Republic.

C'est ça qu'un groupe d'étudiants d'Orléans ont fait pendant leur congé au mois de mars. Jeun'Espoir, un groupe de 12 à 15 étudiants dans leur 12^e année à l'école secondaire, ont passé leurs vacances en offrant leurs services bénévoles dans la région de « Trenchtown » à Kingston, en Jamaïque. Là, les étudiants ont aidé avec des projets de construction et ils ont offert leurs services dans une résidence pour les gens âgés ainsi que dans une résidence pour des enfants abandonnés.

This year, another group of teens departed on a similar mission in the Dominican Republic. Seventeen-year-old Camille Juzwik is a member of the Global Outreach Club at Lester B. Pearson Catholic High School in Orléans and was happy to participate in the program for the first time this year. The students left on Saturday, March 4, to spend two weeks performing humanitarian work in a town called Cambita Garabitas, about 40 kilometres outside Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic.

Monsieur le Président, je voudrais applaudir tous les participants dans le groupe bénévole Jeun'Espoir et le Global Outreach Club. Jeun'Espoir and the Global Outreach Club are two inspirational groups of students

who have demonstrated a remarkable ability to put others before themselves.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): This past weekend, a group of dedicated school bus drivers were officially thanked for their hard work and professionalism at the Let's Remember Adam school bus driver appreciation day at Northgate Square in North Bay. A group of about 70 school bus drivers from across Nipissing were honoured for their hard work in ensuring that our children get to and from school safely.

The Let's Remember Adam campaign is a campaign that has been mounted in memory of Adam Ranger, a five-year-old boy who was struck and killed by a large truck after getting off his school bus, which had its lights flashing, in Mattawa in February 2000. This tragedy was the catalyst for the Let's Remember Adam awareness campaign that has grown over the last two years. First introduced in October 2004 as signs on the back of school buses, we now have decals, posters and billboards all over our community with Adam's face reminding motorists to stop for the flashing signals on school buses. The campaign has most recently added posters in our hockey arenas.

Dave and Debbie Ranger, Adam's parents, took part in the bus driver appreciation day together with representatives of the OPP, the Ministry of Transportation and other community leaders. This partnership of parents, law enforcement agencies, government agencies, the Insurance Bureau of Canada and community-minded businesses has created such a successful campaign that the local OPP detachment has had requests to expand it throughout the province.

I want to take this opportunity to add my thanks to our bus drivers who keep our children safe and to the Rangers and our community partners who have worked so diligently on this tremendous public safety campaign. As our children get ready for spring and want to get out and play, I remind all drivers across the province to please remember Adam and stop for the school bus.

VISITOR

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to recognize a very distinguished visitor to the east gallery of this House, Dr. Mehrdad Hariri, who is representing the Iranian Canadian council.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I request unanimous consent to move a motion inviting those farmers outside into this chamber to sit in the visitors' gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Kormos has asked for unanimous consent to ask the farmers outside to come in to the visitors' gallery. Agreed? I heard a no.

1350

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HAMILTON DAY ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 SUR LE JOUR DE HAMILTON

Ms. Marsales moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to name the first Wednesday of October Hamilton Day / Projet de loi 80, Loi visant à désigner le premier mercredi d'octobre comme Jour de Hamilton.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may make a brief statement.

M^{me} Judy Marsales (Hamilton-Ouest): La ville de Hamilton est reconnue pour sa riche histoire, sa musique et sa diversité culturelle.

Today, Hamilton continues to grow with a zeal that is unmatched. It has become home to a new generation of immigrants who will leave their own distinct mark on the city, as have all the others before them. Hamilton's medical and educational sectors are experiencing an unprecedented expansion that is creating innovation and new opportunities.

It is truly fitting that Hamilton should have its own distinct day of recognition, and the first Wednesday in October of each year provides a perfect day for Hamiltonians and Ontarians to celebrate and pay respect to a city that has provided so much to Ontario and to Canada.

ORAL QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): My question is for the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Minister, 150,000 full-time students at Ontario's 24 community colleges have been locked out of their classrooms since their teachers walked off the job on March 7, 17 days ago. Can you tell us what the key issues are in this dispute?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): Yes, 150,000 students have been out for quite some time, and that causes this government a great deal of concern. I was happy that after not talking to each other, the two parties agreed to return to the table on Monday to resume negotiations, following our discussions with them. I was happy that last night, although they couldn't reach a collective agreement, the two parties agreed that the matters in dispute would be solved by a third party by way of arbitration.

They haven't agreed at the moment on what that should look like, so I have asked the parties to sit down

with Mr. Whitaker, who is chair of the College Relations Commission, so that they can sort out what form arbitration will take. In the meantime, the 150,000 students should go back to class with their faculty and get on with their year and complete the year.

Mrs. Witmer: The minister did not answer the question. I asked you what the key issues are in this dispute; I didn't ask you for an update. We can all read the news releases that have been flying out all over the noon hour. If you don't know what the key issues are in this dispute, how can you propose to resolve them? Is there going to be any money in today's budget to do exactly that?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: One thing all the parties agree on: They are absolutely unanimous in agreeing that 15 years of underfunding by previous governments left the colleges in a state that needs a great deal of investment. They are agreed that the previous government, of which the honourable member was a part, was a party that underfunded colleges for years. With the Reaching Higher investments last year, this government made the biggest investment in post-secondary education in more than 40 years. Those investments are now working to make the system that the previous parties underfunded a much better one.

We're determined to improve the quality of students' education. That's in the best interests of the students and in the best interests of the province of Ontario.

Mrs. Witmer: Despite all the rhetoric, the minister has still not identified the key issues in this dispute, and despite all the rhetoric, he also knows that the union has declared that they are not prepared to take down their picket signs. So I ask you today, can you guarantee that the students will be back in class on Monday? And what are you going to do to make sure that happens?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Of course, the students are why the system exists. The students are the priority of the system. Everybody needs to focus on the interests of the students. That's the reason I spoke with the parties last week and got them back to the bargaining table on Monday. That's the reason this government has taken such an active interest in the students. That's the reason I was pleased that the parties agreed last night that the issues that have been in dispute for 14 months would be referred off to a third party by way of arbitration. That's why I've asked the parties to sit down today with Mr. Whitaker, the chair of the College Relations Commission, to sort out what that looks like, and in the meantime get those pickets down and get the students back into class. For those who say this is about the quality of education: Quality begins with students in the classroom. That's our position.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Mr. Speaker—

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): You should be the leader, Liz.

Mrs. Witmer: I should. No, we have a wonderful leader. And—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Stop the clock. I need to be able to hear the question from the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Mrs. Witmer: Well, Mr. Speaker, it looks like this is going to be a great session: a sense of humour on all sides of the House.

My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, a simple question: Do you support health promotion and disease prevention?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): Yes. The evidence of our government's commitment to health promotion was found in the Premier's decision in June this past year to create a new ministry, the Ministry of Health Promotion, and to give that ministry important leadership in the form of our colleague from Ottawa.

Further evidence of our commitment to a disease prevention model is found in the commitment that we made to aligning our primary care capacity, that is, the access that individual Ontarians have to nurses and doctors at the community level, with a view towards helping people to stay healthy in the first place.

There is of course more to be done on chronic disease models and other forms of preventive health care, but we're very proud of the steps we've taken and feel that this is one of our three fundamental commitments to work with Ontarians to keep them healthier in the first place.

Mrs. Witmer: I'm glad the minister supports that because I want to talk to him today about a clinic that does promote a healthy lifestyle and prevent heart disease. The provincial government has been providing funding to the Ontario Aerobics Centre, a cardiac rehabilitation clinic that has been serving people in Waterloo region, Wellington county and beyond since 2001. I ask the minister today to guarantee that stable funding will continue for this clinic beyond June 30 this year.

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The honourable member will know, because this has been the subject of a conversation between the two of us, that we are committed to working to find a resolution. But the honourable member should also be a little bit more forward in her question to acknowledge that during her term of office as Minister of Health and during the work of her government, in a variety of places in Ontario they did establish one-offs or pilot projects—in this case there are three of them—which have created unequal access to these services for Ontarians. So while we see the merits associated with the model that is in play in the member's area, we do have a concern that these are services that the previous government established, and by doing so, created tremendous inequities for the balance of Ontarians.

Our view is that the principles of a public health care system, one of the most fundamental ones, is equitable access. Accordingly, while we are working with that

health care provider to provide stable funding, we're seeking to do so in a fashion which recognizes the necessity of equitable access to service for all Ontarians.

Mrs. Witmer: The minister knows full well that this community clinic does increase access to services. This clinic, I can tell you, according to patients who testify, has saved their lives. In fact, I was there yesterday with Mr. Arnott and Mr. Martiniuk and heard first-hand from Joseph Hertelendy, who said, "I came back from holidays to beg you to save this establishment. If you close it, you're breaking our hearts and digging our graves."

Minister, if you believe in health promotion and disease prevention, will you respond to this desperate plea, and those of many others, and guarantee today that you will provide stable funding beyond June 30 this year?

1400

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I've already indicated in my earlier answer that the ministry and the health care provider in question are working together with a view towards establishing just that.

I really think it would have been appropriate for the honourable member, in the minute that she had, to acknowledge the decisions she took, as part of a government and as the longest-serving Minister of Health in that government, and that in deciding to fund that operation, at the exclusion of other, similar opportunities across the breadth of Ontario, she has created an inequity which we have a challenge to address.

We have an obligation not just to serve people in our local area well but to serve people well across the breadth of Ontario. There is an anomaly in the health care system that three of these clinics have been funded in Ontario but not all Ontarians are able to access them. Accordingly, while we will work to provide sustainable funding for that organization, we will do so in a fashion that underscores our fundamental commitment to a public health care system with equitable access.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): To the Minister of Community and Social Services: My question is not about what you are doing for the poor; my question is about what you are not doing for the poor. Take, for example, the case of Mr. Dan Warburton, from Hamilton. He receives disability support and needs a special, doctor-ordered diet to keep himself out of the hospital. He used to receive \$240 a month for special formula and healthy food. You've slashed that, by 82%, down to \$45.

Minister, what is your response to Mr. Warburton when he asks how you expect him to carry out his doctor's food regimen on such a pitiful food budget?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I appreciate the question regarding the special diet allowance. It certainly has been an item in the media over the last couple of months.

Yes, we did make changes to help people apply and register for the special diet benefit. The reality is that in

working with the Ontario Medical Association, even this member opposite will realize that we need to rely on our medical professionals to tell us what those medical conditions are that actually warrant this special diet benefit. We have done that: We worked with the Ontario Medical Association to revise an application form so that those who are applying for a special diet allowance in fact have the medical conditions that these physician experts are telling us are required.

Mr. Prue: Madam Minister, we've heard these words before, but it still doesn't put any food into the bellies of people like Mr. Warburton. You promised people receiving social assistance and ODSP some three years ago that you would bring in cost-of-living increases to ensure that they didn't sink further into poverty, but you broke that promise. Last year, you gave them nothing. This year, you've slashed all the rates for their food. Poverty is growing, and Ontario's most vulnerable people are hurting more now than even in the Mike Harris years.

Minister, why do you not just raise the rates of social assistance and ODSP, like you promised, to the level where people can live on them? Or do you simply enjoy carrying out the legacy of the Mike Harris government?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I would like to see on record whether the member opposite would agree that the changes we've made to social assistance in this province are something that he supports. In fact, we took a system that was rife with barriers to move people back into work and we're removing them. To this member opposite, tell me that you agree that the barriers need to go. We have made significant reforms to our social assistance system to do exactly that.

This is the same member who was also opposed to our Jobs Now pilot project, which so far has seen over 2,000 people move from welfare into work, a true work experience for people that means actual jobs.

I hope the member opposite also agrees that social assistance for people on our system, who are on welfare, is in fact supposed to be a transition system to move people back into work. We anticipate that we will have more of that kind of change, and I expect that the member opposite would agree that we need to make sure that people can work, if they can work, and give—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Prue: What I do not agree with is that you allow people on social assistance only \$2.14 a day on which to feed themselves. That's the lowest amount in 15 years. You should be ashamed.

Across this province, there is a movement to fight what you are doing to low-income people. Doctors like Mary Randozzo, Diana Ahmed of Hamilton and Gary Bloch, for example, have demanded help for people who need it most, like the woman who phoned my office and said that she needed special vitamin supplements deemed essential by her dietician, and you say—and I quote—“Tough luck.” Another woman suffers from excruciating IBS. She used to receive \$120 for a doctor-recommended diet of fresh fruit, vegetables and fibre supplements to

keep her well. Now you give her only \$10 a month, a 92% reduction.

Minister, do you feel it is okay to treat people in this unjust way? When are you going to raise the social assistance rates like you promised before the last election, and as you used to demand when you were on this side of the House?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I can tell you that the member opposite is telling information to this House that is simply inaccurate. I have to be clear: It's simply inaccurate. People who have been receiving a special diet allowance and who had a medical condition before are also receiving a special diet allowance if they have that medical condition today. What has changed is that when there was an opportunity for those to receive a special diet for a medical condition that was never identified and may not in fact have existed, yes, that's been a change for these people. We have had to line up a form so that when individuals have a medical condition that requires a special diet, they in fact are receiving the special diet.

In addition to that, we have gone well beyond what we have always suggested we would do in our very first budget with a 3% increase to social assistance, beyond the cost of living in that year. I can tell you that we have more work—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister. New question?

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question as well is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, families in this province are hurting. It's increasingly harder for them to pay the rent, to put food on the table and to put clothing on their children's backs. You promised to reverse the clawback on the national child tax benefit, yet you've broken that promise. When will you live up to your word and stop clawing back the national child tax benefit from the most vulnerable families in Ontario?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I hope the member opposite recognizes the millions more dollars that remain in families' hands today that never used to before this government took office, because those are the facts. Millions of dollars more that have flowed from the federal government are being left in the hands of families.

Another important note that I hope the member opposite would appreciate is that there are fewer families today on our welfare system than were there on the day we took office. That's because of programs that we are initiating, such as better housing programs, such as better child care, such as opportunities for employment that line up with what people who are on our system need.

Please tell me, to this member opposite, that you do agree that it's better when we have fewer people with children on our welfare system and when millions more is being left with families in Ontario thanks to this government.

Ms. Horwath: I hope this minister responsible recognizes the many families that are living in poverty in the province of Ontario. The national child tax benefit was intended to prevent and reduce child poverty in Ontario. You've promised many times and you've talked many times about your desire to end child poverty, but your government continues to claw back this benefit from Ontario Works and ODSP recipients in Ontario. With budget leaks suggesting that your government is awash in cash, will you finally honour your promise and end this disgraceful clawback?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I hope this member opposite agrees that the policy change we made from the moment we took office was to stop clawing back the increases coming from our federal government, and we did that on day one. The result of that policy change is tens of millions more dollars left in the hands of families. I have been the first, as the minister of social services, to say how difficult it is for people to live on our system, and that is why our focus from day one has been to move people off the system if they can be in employment. I expect support from the member opposite. When we take down barriers to move people into the workplace, I expect support from that member opposite, but she has been opposed to every change, every reduction of every barrier in our system. That is unacceptable. She was opposed to our Jobs Now pilot project, and that is unacceptable. Join us, with the changes that we're making to make life better for people who are on our system.

1410

Ms. Horwath: Do you know what, Minister? Your blame-shifting and your doublespeak do not make any difference to the people who are living in poverty in this province. We are shocked that vulnerable families are being forced to use food banks because they simply cannot make ends meet.

You've been advised that ending the child tax benefit clawback was the single best way that you could show your commitment to ending child poverty in Ontario. It's about your responsibility as minister. I'm going to ask you one last time, when will your government help these families out, get them out of poverty and end that clawback?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: I guess a question about poverty in general for Ontario. It begs me asking the NDP here in Ontario, why were they opposed to the initiatives to provide more housing for people in poverty? Why? I ask this party in this House, why were they opposed to the changes that we've made to child care? Why were you opposed to those changes? I ask this party, the NDP, why, when we go fighting with the current federal government that wants to rip up our agreement for child care, you are opposed. These very changes make life better for people who do live in poverty in this province, and we strive every day to make their life better.

Again I say, when we have made changes to make this a system that will move people from welfare into work, you have a responsibility to support those changes

because, above all else, people who are on our welfare system want to be in the workplace. You have a responsibility to help them get there.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): My question is to the Premier. The Toronto Star reported earlier this month that your government plans to spend \$1.5 billion to expand the Spadina subway line to York University in today's budget. The mayor of Vaughan tells a similar story after he met with your MPP from Vaughan-King-Aurora and former Minister of Finance at a Liberal Party fundraiser. He says that Mr. Sorbara told him a "good news story" was coming up in today's budget. In this morning's Globe and Mail, there is an article that explains how Mr. Sorbara is "poised to reap the benefits of higher real estate values" if your government expands the Spadina subway line to apartment buildings and commercial properties that his family owns at Keele Street and Finch Avenue.

It would appear that if today's budget does in fact include a commitment to the York subway extension, then there has been a very serious budget leak. Will you inform this House whether select individuals were advised of the coming budget announcement at a recent Liberal Party fundraiser and whether Mr. Sorbara knew about this proposal?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The member is asking me to engage in speculation about the upcoming budget. I can appreciate his impatience in this regard. I know that many Ontarians have a genuine interest in the contents of the budget, which will be introduced in this Legislature at 4 o'clock this very day. I'd ask him to continue to be patient. I too look forward to the presentation of the budget in this Legislature.

Mr. Wilson: If there has been a leak, then it puts a real cloud over this budget. The information in today's Globe and Mail just raises more questions and underlines the need for the potential budget leak to be carefully investigated. If this turns out to have been a leak, Premier, will you turn this over to the OPP for a full investigation?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, I will not engage in any kind of speculation whatsoever about the contents of the budget. I can say with respect to our budget that we will continue to emphasize those priorities shared by Ontarians and informed by the values also shared by Ontarians. We will continue to make progress with respect to health care, to education and to growing this economy.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. Minister, college faculty members in Ontario are eager to end the strike and submit their dispute to arbitration under the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act. Why won't you

support them in their efforts to shut down those picket lines?

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): We're enormously supportive of the students getting back to class. In fact, last night, both sides to this issue indicated that they were prepared to have the issues in dispute resolved by a third party through arbitration. Unfortunately, they can't seem to agree on the form of the arbitration, so I suggested today that they sit down with the chair of the College Relations Commission and work out the form of the arbitration. But in the meantime, having agreed that it goes to be resolved by a third party, let's bring down the pickets and get the faculty back in the classrooms and the students back to class. Let the students finish their year. There's no reason the students should wait outside the class while the parties talk about what form the arbitration will take.

Mr. Kormos: Students are waiting for you to accept some responsibility and display some leadership. Final-offer selection is hardly arbitration. It's the Russian roulette of industrial relations. You know full well that final-offer selection is not the way to achieve a balanced and fair result where both sides can live with the resolution.

So I say to you once again, Minister, rather than playing cute, why aren't you supporting the call of those OPSEU members for binding arbitration under the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act so that those picket lines can come down and those students can get back into the classroom along with their professors?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: We are very supportive of the students getting back in the classroom, and when both parties agreed the matter would be resolved by third party arbitration, that should have been the end of the work stoppage. The parties can talk about the form of it and they can resolve the form of it with the chair of the College Relations Commission, Mr. Whitaker—extremely experienced. The parties can talk about that, but you don't need to keep the students out of the classroom while they talk about that.

The reason for the work stoppage is over. All the issues will be resolved by third party arbitration. The real question today is, are the NDP going to support the pickets coming down and the students getting back in class? Are they going to support 150,000 students getting their year?

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): My question is for the Minister of Energy. Last Tuesday, I had the pleasure of welcoming the Premier, the Minister of Energy and noted environmentalist David Suzuki to my community to visit Photowatt Technologies, one of our country's leading manufacturers of solar products. There, it was announced that our government was making it easier for entrepreneurs and businesses to sell clean power from small projects to the grid through a standard-

offer contract. This is an exciting time for small power producers, who now can afford to sell energy to the grid.

Through this plan, farmers, community groups, First Nations and even municipalities can play an important role in boosting renewable energy production in this province. For years our energy supply was neglected, first by the New Democratic government and then by the PC government.

Can the minister share some of the details of last Tuesday's announcement and the public response thus far?

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I would like to thank the member from Kitchener Centre for being such an advocate for renewable energy, and in particular for photovoltaics. Well done.

It's an exciting time in Ontario. We are actually the first jurisdiction in North America to have such an extraordinary offer to put forward, as the member indicated, to farmers, to small businesses and to individuals in the standard offer for wind, water, solar and biomass. It's an incredibly bold step that this government has taken and, as Dr. Suzuki said, puts us at the forefront not only of every other jurisdiction in North America but in actually providing cleaner energy, renewable energy, and cleaner air for our children to breathe. We anticipate that over the next 10 years, over 1,000 megawatts will actually come from this program for over 250,000 homes from the standard-offer contract.

Mr. Milloy: I want to thank the minister for that answer. My community is home to such companies as Photowatt, which I've already mentioned. We also have ARISE Technologies. In addition, the University of Waterloo is home to some of the country's leading solar power research.

Last Tuesday's announcement, by offering a competitive price for renewable energy, will provide a tremendous boost to the market for their products and be of economic benefit to my region. The announcement was not only about the environment; it was about creating jobs and economic prosperity. Already I have been hearing from groups and individuals eager to sign a standard-offer contract. Can the minister explain to the Legislature who is eligible to be part of this program?

1420

Hon. Mrs. Cansfield: Under the standard-offer contract, all small-scale renewable energy producers will be able to sell renewable energy directly into the grid for a 20-year contract at a fixed price. There is no limit to the amount of renewable generating capacity that can be brought online through this program, and the projects can be located virtually anywhere in Ontario. Each individual project can produce up to a maximum of 10 megawatts, with the exception of photovoltaics, which has no maximum. The program is open to all interested individuals and small companies, with the exception of Ontario Power Generation. All new projects must connect directly to the distribution system. This is the best part of the program, because it is local. The eligible projects must have been in service after January 1, 2000.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): My question is for the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Royal Victoria Hospital's phase 1 redevelopment project includes expansions to the emergency department, diagnostic imaging, additional in-patient beds and construction of the 73,000-square-foot cancer centre, featuring three radiation therapy suites, with construction scheduled to start in 2008. In your letter to the chair of RVH dated February 8, 2006, you indicated, "The project will be subject to legislative appropriation and all applicable approvals of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care." Minister, can you be more specific as to what you mean by "legislative appropriation" and "ministry approvals"?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): What this speaks to is very customary elements of accountability, which would include, of course, before a project goes to tender, making sure that the plan about what is to be constructed has been signed off by the ministry. The references in that letter would be very standard language that either of the former health ministers in your caucus would be able to tell you, I'm quite certain, is exact and carried on over a period of decades.

This really just speaks to the idea that a letter should not be received by a hospital as *carte blanche* to take a project all the way to tender, that there would be a series of steps along the way that ensure we're all on the same pathway with respect to what services will be delivered there and, accordingly, what the makeup of the physical construct is like. It's necessary for our accountabilities to operate within the budget allocated to us through the processes here in the Legislature. Accordingly, all of the language referenced in the letter is part of those accountability procedures.

Mr. Tascona: The RVH expansion and Cancer Care project has received, as you know because you've been in the riding, unparalleled support from the community. The community financial support for the funding of this project is on track to be met in 2006—this year. The Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, in its press release of September 29, 2005, states, "Construction is scheduled to start in 2008," which I interpret to mean shovel in the ground. Given that the community financial support will be met this year, would the minister commit to considering having construction begin prior to 2008, and if not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think it's very, very important, as I've had the privilege of speaking about before on this issue, to remind the honourable member that as it relates to the construction of new cancer facilities, we do take advice and guidance from Cancer Care Ontario. While you used the word "unparalleled" to speak about the community support that exists for your project, I think that members from the Niagara region would tell you about the unparalleled level of support that is there for their project, that the member from Sault Ste. Marie would most certainly tell you about the un-

paralleled support that's available for their project, which includes a cancer bunker. We have facilities coming to life as well in your colleague's riding in the community of Newmarket. New cancer capacity is necessary, and development of it is under way in communities including Kingston and Ottawa.

The point I want to make to the honourable member is that while we recognize that Barrie enjoys a tremendous amount of support for expansion at RVH, we do have, by necessity, the requirement to phase these projects in consistent with advice from Cancer Care Ontario, which is based on the idea of where the need is most present. We sought to make sure that our work, alongside the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, is well coordinated with the direction and advice that we receive from our friends at Cancer Care Ontario. We've done that, and accordingly, these projects are coming to life.

EATING DISORDERS

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Health as well. On February 6, I wrote to you about finding a residential treatment bed for my constituent Eric Trimmer, who has a life-threatening eating disorder. He has been ill for about six years, has been hospitalized and nearly died twice from his illness. There are virtually no treatment beds in Ontario for 70,000 young people who suffer from eating disorders. Minister, why can't Eric get a residential treatment bed in Ontario when he is so desperately in need?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): The honourable member will know that our government had the opportunity very recently to make a very significant advancement in the resources available for eating disorders. This is a challenge, of course, that a significant number of our population is facing. Accordingly, we felt it was appropriate to enhance the amount of resources available for them.

The nature of the challenge with respect to a bed is something I don't have a specific answer for, top of mind, for the honourable member, but as she has written correspondence, of course an answer from the ministry will be forthcoming. Part and parcel of the investments we're making across the breadth of health care is to address the challenges which remain—there are, of course, very many. On the issue of eating disorders, our government recently made a very significant increase in our capacity to assist people who are struggling with those challenges.

Ms. Horwath: Minister, when New Democrats asked you about this critical problem back in November, you said that help was on the way. Unfortunately, the help was only to overcome some budget deficits of existing services. Seventy thousand young people in Ontario suffer from eating disorders, and Ontario currently has only 30 treatment beds—for 70,000 young people. In the Hamilton region alone, there are 200 people like Eric Trimmer who are waiting for a bed. You spent \$5.6 million last year to send patients to treatment beds in the US

and you're skimping on those investments here at home. Some parents have actually lost their children to this kind of illness.

Minister, why are you turning your back on people with serious eating disorders, like Eric, who desperately need to have those treatment beds here in Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I would say to the honourable member that this is just one more example of the rhetoric being rather out of touch with reality. Only the honourable member, as part of that caucus, could talk about a 68% increase in resources over three fiscal years as turning your back on patients with these challenges. I will remind the honourable member that when you had the privilege of being in government, you spent \$1 million a year on challenges related to eating disorders, and we've increased that to \$24 million. Accordingly, I think 68% does speak to improvement. But let's hear from Mary Kaye Lucier, executive director of the Bulimia Anorexia Nervosa Association: "We are overjoyed with the announcement of today's funding. This means that as the central intake for persons with eating disorders ... we will now be able to hire more staff to address the needs of ... people requiring intensive specialized treatment for eating disorders...." This is further evidence that our investments are paving the way to better access to these services for Ontarians who very much need them, and that is our goal and our responsibility.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West–Mississauga): My question is for the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies and is more than ever becoming a burgeoning opportunity for trade and investment for foreign governments. Over the past decade we have not had a presence. Minister, can you please tell us what our government is doing to engage India and build on our current relationship?

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): I'd like to thank the member for his question. It's an important question, because I'm happy to report that we just officially opened our new office in New Delhi on February 20. It is a co-located office in our Canadian High Commission, which will give us the opportunity to work with officials there.

India is an emerging economic powerhouse. We can ill afford to ignore the opportunities that exist in India to expand trade and attract additional amounts of investment. A significant number of Indian companies are already located here in Ontario. They view Ontario as the gateway to the North American market. It's a near shore location for those companies, many of them in the ITC sector, and there are additional companies that are looking to expand further into Ontario. By all accounts there are some 2,000 firms in India that are poised to make investments in North America. We want those investments here in Ontario.

Mr. Dhillon: Minister, it's great to see that our government's plan for our economy includes stimulating for-

eign trade and investment here in Ontario. Exactly how vital are emerging markets, such as India, to Ontario's future prosperity?

Hon. Mr. Cordiano: Two-way trade in 2004 between India and Ontario was about \$1 billion, but we can do much better than that. In fact, it's estimated that India's need for infrastructure will amount to some \$170 billion over the next few years. This is an enormous opportunity for many companies in Ontario to sell their services, their expertise and their products into a market that is expanding enormously.

We are expanding our relationship, as I say. We have an office and, more than that, we are dedicating additional resources in the ministry to back our efforts in India and also to work with the great, diverse population right here in Ontario. There are half a million Canadians of Indian descent and we want to make sure that they also assist us. We use their networks and leverage their contacts so that we can further—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

1430

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): To the Minister of Agriculture: Minister, as you will know, thousands of farm families are anticipating good news at 4 o'clock in this year's budget. Will your budget meet their expectations, or have you again failed the farm families of Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): The honourable member would know that I am not able to speculate on what is in the budget, but I'm very delighted to have this opportunity to talk a bit about our government's commitment to agriculture and to farmers.

A couple of weeks ago we invested \$125 million for an industry very much in need: \$80 million for grains and oilseeds and \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers. I know the member from Cambridge wouldn't have any of those in his riding; he doesn't seem too appreciative of this. But I can tell you, I have many, many letters from those folks who say that they very much support the investments we have made. I think that it's important that the honourable members would recognize as well that these dollars are going to the farmers on the concession roads.

Mr. Barrett: Cash crop, beef, tobacco, hort., dairy heifer export, cull cow, even beekeepers are presently in crisis. In fact, as you know, there's not a single commodity that's either not in crisis, anticipating a looming crisis or, at minimum, worried.

Minister, again, will this budget present the plan, to be specific, for risk management, BSE equity replacement, self-directed risk insurance—you mentioned hort.—the tobacco farmer buyout and other programs required, or have you again failed the farmers across the province of Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Again, I am not in a position and—I will not speculate about what's in the budget this afternoon. I invite all the members of this Legislature to pay very close attention to all of the good news that will be announced this afternoon.

I do want to talk about the level of government that's letting farmers down and that government is in Ottawa. That government has failed to come to the table to agree to partner with us on a multi-year strategy. We have been at the table since November, very willing to engage in the multi-year strategy that producers have been asking for.

I'm asking the federal government, and I would ask you to encourage your federal cousins—Prime Minister Harper, your former colleague Jim Flaherty and Minister Chuck Strahl—to come to the table with the Ontario government for the good of the farmers in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Order. New question.

RENEWABLE FUELS

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Premier. In your election platform you stated, "We will introduce mandatory biodiesel content in diesel fuel." Premier, when will you do that?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): As the honourable member knows, we have implemented our plan with respect to ethanol content in gasoline; we are working very hard to get that under way. I am also awaiting a report that will enable us to move forward on our plan for biodiesel.

Ms. Martel: On September 12, 2005, a press release from the Ontario Trucking Association claimed that your promise to introduce mandatory biodiesel for Ontario's commercial trucks "has been put on hold."

Can you tell those struggling soybean and canola farmers who are circling the Legislature today when you will keep your election promise and introduce mandatory biodiesel content in diesel fuel?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Again, as I've indicated to the honourable member, she has identified one of the stakeholders that has identified a concern and would like their interest considered as we move forward in developing a strategy. Our government has a very strong history of listening to the concerns of all people who bring their valid issues to us, and that will be part of the consideration of our strategy.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. First I would like to say what a pleasure it was to serve you as parliamentary assistant. It was

a great honour. I want to say that you were a mentor and a friend.

Through my time in your office, I learned first-hand of your commitment to every member of this Legislature and every last citizen of Ontario. In my own riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh we have seen great things happen under your watch. When you first gained your post as Minister of Health, I was there at your door. I came to you with three hospital projects: the Winchester District Memorial Hospital, the Cornwall Community Hospital and the St. Joseph's Continuing Care Centre project. Together, we were able to deliver far more than I had originally envisioned. My riding is beginning a true health care renaissance. On December 21 you came to my riding and talked about that renaissance.

Minister, could you share with this House some of the great health care projects that are being done in Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): See there: It's on the record about what a nice fellow I am. I appreciate that very much. I want to thank the honourable member for his hard work as parliamentary assistant, and I want to say hi to his mom, because I know she's a devoted watcher of question period.

The fact is that that fine riding has three distinct projects. At St. Joseph's health care centre in Cornwall there is a construction project under way. At Cornwall Community Hospital we're a very short period of time away from moving forward with a head-start project, which is a necessary development before the major redevelopment. At Winchester District Memorial Hospital, we have a significant redevelopment coming under way shortly.

The net effect of this, as I had the privilege of saying in that community on December 21 last year, is that within a four- or five-year time horizon it's safe to assume that this part of Ontario is going to see the most modern health care infrastructure of any area in the province of Ontario, rather than the rubber cheques of the past that that party promised—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. There may be a supplementary.

Mr. Brownell: Thank you, Minister. I would also join with you in thanking Bonnie Ruest and her team at St. Joseph's, Trudy Reid and everyone at the Winchester District Memorial Hospital and Jeanette Despattie and those who have worked so hard for the Cornwall Community Hospital. They have been joined by Tom and Gail Kaneb, who were chairs of the Our Hospital, Our Future fundraising campaign which just announced that they have raised \$12 million for that Cornwall project.

The people of my riding have worked hard and will continue to work hard to secure a prosperous future for themselves and their children. They really understand what needs to be done to move forward. They get it and this government gets it. We understand that what the people need is not a handout but a hand up. We are providing that through funding initiatives, infrastructure projects and continued dialogue with community leaders.

Minister, we have done much for the people of the riding of Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh, and more is to come. Could you share with us some of the initiatives this government has undertaken in my riding in the past year alone—

The Speaker: Thank you. The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: To the Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Joseph Cordiano (Minister of Economic Development and Trade): Let me thank the member for his dedicated work for his constituents.

We have taken a number of initiatives. We've established an action centre to help employees find new opportunities in the region. We are funding a project manager to coordinate the social services that will be needed by workers who have lost some work there. We're developing a new economic marketing strategy for the region as well.

Also, there is good news this week with respect to the courthouse in Cornwall. Not only have we announced this, but there are now shovels in the ground. Construction is under way and that's great news for the city of Cornwall. I'm happy to report that. And additional work is going to be under way as well.

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DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My question was to the Minister of Transportation, but I'll direct it to the Premier. Premier, your Minister of Transportation has created, yet again, another conundrum by adding more red tape to getting a driver's licence in Ontario. It wasn't until this issue was raised by Bill Murdoch, Ted Chudleigh and myself in the Legislature, in questions, that the minister was even aware of some of the problems with the new procedures to acquire a licence. Finally, the minister agreed that new drivers would be recognized. If they had difficulty, they could get a guarantor form signed. But now there's another piece of red tape that I'm sure he's not even aware of and I'd ask you to direct it to his attention. He has been occupied with other issues. My question is, what are you going to do for newcomers in Ontario who need to have their driver's licence from another country validated?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I appreciate the question in the absence of the minister. What I can do, of course, is undertake to bring it to the minister's attention.

Let me just try to articulate some general principles. Obviously, we are strongly supportive of the quality associated with the standards that we have in place in Ontario when it come to drivers' licences, generally speaking. Our intention would be to ensure that while we don't want to put new Canadians through unnecessary hoops, at the same time we don't want to do anything that would reduce the quality of the standard that we here in Ontario attach to the abilities that should be associated with an Ontario driver's licence.

Mr. O'Toole: Yes, you're right. In fact, Premier, the auditor was very critical that the minister was allowing people to use a Costco card as a means of identification.

Now you've just gone too far, and that's really the issue here. You know just how important it is for newcomers to Ontario and their families to be able to get around the province. To have a vehicle is absolutely critical for them to integrate into the economy and, indeed, into society.

I've received e-mails on this. Getting a letter of confirmation, they have to go to the embassy, the consulate or the high commissioner. In practical application here, who at the consulate would know who they are, to validate this licence or to sign a guarantor form? What is your solution for newcomers to Ontario to get through this additional red tape that your minister has created? What are you going to do to make their life of getting a driver's licence to integrate in this province easier in the future?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I believe that the honourable member raises a good point. I think it's really important that we understand that our responsibility on this side of the House, as those who are privileged to serve Ontarians as their government, is to recognize that we have to strike the right balance. We don't want to put new Canadians through hoops unnecessarily, as I said, but at the same time, we do want to ensure that we are taking necessary precautionary measures.

I will undertake, as I indicated earlier, to bring this to the attention of the Minister of Transportation so that he can speak directly to the member opposite about this.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I have a question to the Minister of Health. District social services administration boards deliver provincial services to organized and unorganized communities in northern Ontario. The costs to deliver these provincial services to the unorganized communities are covered by the various ministries. Every ministry except your own pays these costs on an ongoing basis. Your ministry pays these costs one year after they are incurred, putting DSSABs into a serious financial position when they're trying to provide emergency services. Minister, when will your ministry pay these bills on time?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): If memory serves me right, that practice began under your government. But I will take the opportunity to take the honourable member's question under advisement with a view towards seeing if there is a capacity on the part of our ministry to be aligned with the practices of other government ministries. It's not an issue that I have had raised to me, that I can recall at least, directly by any of these service providers. Of course, we do depend on them to provide vital services and, accordingly, if there are opportunities for us to alter the mechanism in terms of the way that we pay, that's something that I would like to take a look at.

I do believe, by recollection, that that is a practice that may have been inherited, if you will, from decisions made by previous governments, but if there is a logical opportunity for alignment of these things, that's something that it would be very much my pleasure to work with the honourable member to address.

Ms. Martel: If I might, the DSSABs were created by the Conservative government, so no, Minister, you can't lay the blame on our government. This issue indeed has been raised with your government on more than one occasion. In fact, I raised it with your deputy at the public accounts committee on March 2. This is an ongoing problem that has been raised with your government now on many occasions and has yet to be resolved. Every DSSAB in northern Ontario incurs a serious financial problem because your ministry pays its bills for emergency services one year after these costs are incurred. This matter has to be resolved. I would ask you again, Minister, when can we expect a change in your ministry's policies so that the DSSABs in northern Ontario will not continue to be put at ongoing financial risk?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I think ample evidence of our commitment to the provision of appropriate land ambulance services can be seen reflected in the commitment that the Premier made recently at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario meeting. The government of Ontario is committed to expending \$300 million additional over the next three years to get back on track in terms of a very, very good partnership between health service providers, in this case related to land ambulance, and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This addresses one of the most significant areas of concern for municipalities who felt like the provincial formula was not working well to their benefit. I do know that flow of funds, including to the DSSABs, is under way to be able to more fully address the costs associated with them.

Of course, it is not exactly imprudent to be able to flow funds on the basis of actual expenditure, rather than those that are projected. But as I said to my honourable friend in the earlier answer, we will take a good look at this and see—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers. Recently, the federal government announced its plan to terminate, eliminate, the early learning and child care agreement signed by the previous government of Canada. I know that this is an agreement on which the McGuinty government worked long and hard, especially given the interests of the thousands of Ontario families who need high-quality early learning and child care. I raise this with you because this announcement will have a particularly serious impact in modest-income constituencies such as my own, the great riding of Etobicoke North.

Minister, would you inform this House, explain to us, what the termination of this agreement would mean to Ontario families, especially to the young families in the city of Toronto. What exactly is in play?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I want to thank my colleague the MPP from Etobicoke North for caring about families in his communities. In the Toronto area, in which Etobicoke would fall, the projection was for almost 6,000 spaces in the first three years of this agreement, \$268 million. This is a huge issue, obviously.

The YWCA went across Canada doing a report recently that confirmed that the direction that our government has been taking on early learning and high-quality child care is the right direction. We are calling upon all parties to this issue—parents, school boards, advocates in every single aspect of this area—to support our call for the federal government to honour this agreement.

Mr. Qaadri: Clearly, from my own assessment at the riding level, this is an agreement that is of vital importance to Ontario families. I believe strongly that all members of this House, irrespective of party affiliation, need to deliver this message to the current Harper government. Minister, here is a rerouted question to you from my own riding: What can concerned families in my community of Etobicoke North do to advocate for the early learning and child care agreement that we signed with the government of Canada? And Minister, just as importantly, would you have any encouraging advice for opposition parties in this House so that they too would stand up for the thousands of Ontario families who have been anticipating the benefits of this child care agreement?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: This agreement between the government of Ontario and the government of Canada was in fact a non-partisan agreement. We never viewed this agreement as an agreement with the Liberal government of Canada; we viewed this agreement as an agreement with the government of Canada.

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I am actually very encouraged by what the federal NDP is saying and I would call upon our provincial NDP colleagues to support their federal colleagues. I'm very pleased with that. I am also asking Mr. Tory and the Conservatives here in Ontario to support the families and children in their ridings, to lobby their MPs and make it very clear that this impacts all families and all children who need high-quality child care. This is not about any political or partisan stripe; this is about—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): My question is to the Premier. I want to remind you that you stated after the federal election that it would be in the best interests of the new Prime Minister to follow through on commitments made by the Martin Liberals to the Ontario government. The people of Woodstock have been waiting for

two and a half years for the McGuinty Liberals to honour a commitment made by a previous provincial government.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. Order. The member for Oxford.

Mr. Hardeman: Not only was a commitment made to fund a new Woodstock hospital, but \$12 million was sent and spent. The minister said to my colleague, in answering his question, that there's a process they go through and the ministry follows through. The final part of the process is the final approval to go to tender. That is where Woodstock General Hospital is. I ask you, Premier, can the people of Woodstock be assured that in today's budget there is going to be funding designated to Woodstock General Hospital so they can go to final tender and do what the minister said: follow through the process, do what they were asked to do, get it done and get approval from the provincial government to get it finished?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I might first say that I would have thought that this old-style grandstanding by the honourable member had really lost its place. We've had so much opportunity over the course of the last two and a half years to offer evidence of where the Conservative Party, in the run-up to the last election, ran all over Ontario with their big rubber cheques, promising this, that and the other thing, and not just leaving the kitty bare, but having overspent it by \$5.6 billion. So it's a bit galling to hear the honourable member do that.

But notwithstanding that, the mayor of Woodstock, as an example, and the people from the local hospital have taken a more positive view. They've worked very hard, recognizing that across the breadth of Ontario there are many hospitals left behind by that government over a period of time, worked diligently with the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal in the largest single investment in hospitals in the province of Ontario, to rebuild them. I can give this assurance to the people of Woodstock: We have never lost cause with them, we have never found fault with the necessity of the proposal and we will continue to work with—

The Speaker: Thank you. It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Jerry J. Ouellette (Oshawa): I have a petition that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular de-

generation (wet), and there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"Therefore, be it resolved that we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the government of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most individuals and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I affix my name in full support.

RELEASE OF HOSTAGES

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: Today we learned of the successful rescue of two Canadian hostages and one British hostage being held captive in Iraq. One of the hostages, James Loney, is from Sault Ste. Marie. Premier McGuinty and our government and, I'm sure it's appropriate to say, all members of this House are extremely pleased for the individuals and their families for their release.

James Loney and others put their values of peace and goodwill ahead of their personal safety, and we commend them for their perseverance under such extreme circumstances. We thank those in foreign affairs who worked so hard for their release. At this time, our thoughts and prayers are also with the friends and family of American Tom Fox.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly regarding community mediation. It's signed by a number of individuals in Mississauga and it reads as follows:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West, and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much

greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

This is an excellent petition. I'm pleased to sign and support it and to ask page Zacharie to carry it for me.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the government of Ontario address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

I've also signed this.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

"Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

"Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community."

These are from residents of Peterborough. I will affix my signature.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): My petition is intended to be addressed to the Ontario Legislature, and it reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, find it disturbing that children with disabilities in our communities are forced to wait two to three times longer for basic therapy services than in other parts of Ontario. Further, we find that the current wait times are excessive and contravene the government's own research findings regarding the importance of early intervention. We petition our MPPs with the following message:

"Early intervention for children with special needs is critical. Our children deserve fair funding for KidsAbility services. We want the April provincial budget to include an additional \$2.3 million to serve the wait-listed children in Waterloo region and Wellington county."

It's signed by a significant number of my constituents.

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MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition. It's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and reads as follows:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I'm pleased to affix my signature to this petition in support of it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford): I'm very pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which reads as follows:

"Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care homes, need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

"Whereas even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up,

dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years, 2006-07."

I affix my signature in support.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): "Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

"Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high-quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

"Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario's early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it."

I am happy to sign this and will pass it to Charlotte to deliver it to the table.

CELLPHONES

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario

"Whereas the safe operation of a motor vehicle requires the driver's undivided attention; and

"Whereas research has shown that the operation of devices such as cellphones and other in-car technology detract from a driver's ability to respond and concentrate on the task at hand," driving, "and

"Whereas more than 30 jurisdictions around the world have already passed legislation to restrict the use of cellphones while driving; and

"Whereas Durham MPP John O'Toole has introduced a private member's bill that would enact regulations, raise awareness and gather data on distracted driving;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, respectfully petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows: That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario support Bill 68, Highway Traffic Amendment Act (Cellular Phones), 2006."

I'm pleased to sign this, on behalf of my many constituents who support Bill 68, and present it to Raelene, one of the new pages here.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I've got a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas rebuilding our post-secondary education system is critical to the future of our communities and our province; and

"Whereas high tuition user fees are resulting in massive student debt; and

"Whereas Ontario ranks second-last amongst all provinces in terms of total PSE budget received from government grants, and has the highest percentage of total post-secondary education revenue from private sources; and

"Whereas working and learning conditions must be healthy and safe because working conditions are learning conditions; and

"Whereas the deferred maintenance cost at Ontario university campuses is estimated to have already reached the \$2-billion mark;

"We, the undersigned, support the Canadian Union of Public Employees' call on the provincial government to invest sufficient public funds that will:

"(1) Restore public money cut from operating funds since 1995 and bring Ontario up to the national average for funding post-secondary education;

"(2) Finance the \$1.98 billion needed for deferred maintenance; and

"(3) Provide the funding needed to continue the tuition freeze beyond 2006 and increase grants to working-class families."

Signed by scores of people and by myself as well.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea-Gore-Malton-Springdale): This petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

"Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

"Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario's early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it."

I support this petition and I affix my signature on this one.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it's signed by a great number of my constituents and constituents from ridings surrounding the great riding of Oxford.

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years, 2006 and 2007."

I affix my signature to the petition, as I agree with it.

CHILD CARE

Mrs. Maria Van Bommel (Lambton-Kent-Middlesex): My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

"Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

"Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario's early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of

the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it."

As a mother and an OMA, I endorse this one as well.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I believe we have unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 p.m.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Bradley has asked for unanimous consent to suspend proceedings until 4 o'clock. Agreed? Agreed.

We'll therefore suspend the proceedings until 4 o'clock, and I will cause the bells to ring to call the members at 3:55.

The House suspended proceedings from 1510 to 1600.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2006 ONTARIO BUDGET

BUDGET DE L'ONTARIO DE 2006

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I move, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Duncan has moved, seconded by Mr. McGuinty, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

I'd like to ask the indulgence of the House as we ask the pages to deliver the documents.

Have all members received a copy of the budget?

Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I think I speak on behalf of all members of the House when I say how happy and delighted we are at the release of the Canadian hostages today in Afghanistan. I'm sure all members of the House join us in that sentiment.

Applause.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I bet that's the last applause I'll see on that side of the House today.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present the McGuinty Liberal government's 2006-07 budget.

Opportunity is the foundation upon which our society—and our economy—is built.

Giving each Ontarian the opportunity to build success has always been the right thing to do.

Today, in the global economy of the 21st century, it's also the right economic strategy for the province of Ontario.

This budget represents the next step in our plan to build opportunity.

Monsieur le Président, le budget que nous déposons aujourd'hui représente la prochaine étape de notre plan visant à créer des occasions de réussir.

And before I tell you about our plan, I want to provide some context.

When we came to office in 2003, we inherited a health care deficit, an education and skills deficit, an infrastructure deficit and a fiscal deficit.

In the last two and a half years, we have set about addressing each of these challenges in a planned and deliberate way.

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge that it was in part through the hard work and dedication and vision of my predecessor, Greg Sorbara, that we have come so far.

Family physicians are seeing more Ontarians. First-year medical school spaces will increase by 23%. More nurses will attend to our sick and infirm. Dozens more MRI and CT machines have been purchased for the public health system. Wait times are down, and in key procedures such as radiation treatment are down 16% in just one short year.

We have launched the most significant investment in higher education, delivering 75,000 new spaces, doubling student aid and investing an additional \$6.2 billion in improved quality, accountability and accessibility in post-secondary education.

We have made great progress for our younger students. Half our students in the critically important grades of junior kindergarten to grade 3 are now in classes of fewer than 20 students.

Sixty-two per cent of grade 3 and grade 6 students are now meeting the provincial standard in reading, writing and math, up from a little more than half just two years ago.

All of this has been achieved with a prudent and balanced approach that allows us to invest in our future prosperity while keeping our taxes competitive.

1610

We are on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit no later than 2008-09. A balanced budget will be achieved a full year earlier if the reserve is not needed.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We'll teach them how to balance the budget, Mr. Speaker.

In 2005, the Ontario economy, in spite of what they said, outperformed the average private sector and government projections, resulting in additional revenue. We have made a strategic and prudent choice to invest over 60% of this additional money to begin paying down Ontario's infrastructure deficit.

We're on track to pay down the mortgage, but we have to make sure that the foundation is solid.

The next step in strengthening that foundation—in building opportunity—is our plan to address the infrastructure deficit.

Infrastructure is the schools where our children learn, the hospitals where we are treated, the public transit systems we ride, the roads we drive on, the plants that clean our drinking water and the power stations that keep our lights on.

It's how we get our goods to the world's markets and a big part of how we market ourselves to the world.

Each generation is called upon to build and renew our vital infrastructure.

Today, our focus is transportation infrastructure. Quick, reliable, safe transportation is vital to our economic success. It's also essential to our quality of life.

It means the opportunity for our economy to be more competitive by moving goods more efficiently.

It means the opportunity for Ontarians to travel more safely on improved roads and bridges.

That's why I am proud to announce Move Ontario, a new \$1.2-billion investment in public transit, municipal roads and bridges that will build opportunity for each and every citizen of this province.

C'est la raison pour laquelle je suis fier d'annoncer Transports-Action Ontario, un nouvel investissement de 1,2 milliard de dollars dans les réseaux de transport en commun, les routes et les ponts municipaux de la province, afin de créer des conditions favorables dont tout le monde bénéficiera.

Move Ontario has the potential to create 27,000 new jobs.

The centrepiece of Move Ontario is a landmark \$838-million investment to enable the expansion and modernization of public transit in the greater Toronto area.

Move Ontario can help build a new subway into York region and new projects to fight gridlock and speed travel across Brampton and Mississauga. We hope you'll support this. It's in the public interest.

The city of Toronto and York region will be able to use \$670 million to extend the subway to the Vaughan Corporate Centre at Highway 7.

York region's population has grown by over 50% in the last 10 years, and the city of Toronto has said that this is its first choice for expansion.

For the first time in our history, subway service will be able to extend beyond regional boundaries, from the 416 to the 905, building opportunity for everyone in the greater Toronto area.

We're also providing \$200 million in additional support to the city of Toronto's existing subway operations.

The province will provide \$65 million to Mississauga. That city will be able to develop its Transitway—a dedicated bus line along Highway 403 and Eglinton Avenue.

Brampton will benefit from \$95 million. It will be able to build its AcceleRide project, providing express bus service through dedicated bus lines within the city.

I am delighted to have Mayor Miller, Mayor McCallion, Mayor Fennell and York Regional Chair Fisch, our partners in this great undertaking, here today in the gallery.

The Minister of Transportation will introduce legislation shortly to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority.

The GTTA could promote seamless movement of people and goods and could oversee an integrated fare card for use across the entire GTA transit system.

These investments are the beginning of a new era in public transit in the GTA. I know that all members of this

House join me in urging the federal government to participate fully in this opportunity.

Our vision of transportation infrastructure extends right across this great province.

In keeping with our commitment to municipalities, in October we will again increase the share of gas tax for public transit to two cents per litre.

Over five years, this program will have delivered more than \$1.4 billion to municipalities.

And I'm pleased to announce that as of today, municipalities will be able to use the gas tax funding for transit operations as well as for capital. Municipalities have been asking for this for some time, and we're proud to give it to them today.

Roads and bridges are crucial to the entire province.

Through our five-year ReNew Ontario plan, the government will provide a total of \$3.4 billion to improve the provincial highway network in southern Ontario and \$1.8 billion for highways in northern Ontario.

I am proud to announce today that Move Ontario will provide an additional \$400 million in immediate one-time funding, with special emphasis on rural and northern municipalities, for municipal road and bridge repair and upgrading.

We believe in working as partners with municipalities, and that's why they will set their own priorities. This funding is enough to repair up to 800 local bridges or resurface 3,000 kilometres of municipal roads. Just to put that in context, that is the distance from Thunder Bay to Ottawa and back again. That is a real investment in municipalities.

Ultimately, this will mean safer roads and more reliable movement of goods and people across Ontario.

Timely delivery of goods is vitally important to the province, and exports are the lifeblood of our economy. Ontarians need to know that their borders are safe and secure while allowing the free flow of goods.

More than 70% of the value of Canada-US road trade is carried on Ontario highways.

We've already made highway improvements near our border crossings to help with traffic flow and safety concerns.

We'll be moving forward this year with the federal government on our \$300-million investment in the Windsor gateway and the \$323-million investment in the Niagara and Sarnia crossings.

Efficient borders are important to people and businesses, and so too is electricity.

The government has taken on one of the most ambitious building programs in North America for new electricity generation. Over the course of three years, we have initiated dozens of projects to provide, together with our conservation efforts, about 11,000 megawatts of supply over the next five years.

That's enough to power five million homes.

Hydro One is investing more than \$3 billion over the next five years in its transmission and distribution systems.

1620

We have also announced a three-year extension of stable pricing for electricity provided by Ontario Power Generation. Our pricing policy saved electricity consumers about \$740 million in 2005 alone.

This government is committed to creating a culture of conservation. Our goal is to achieve 10% reduction in the government's electricity use by 2007, and we are encouraging consumers to reduce their use of electricity with the installation of 800,000 smart meters by 2007.

Be it through new generation or conservation, the McGuinty government will keep the lights on.

We're increasing supply, decreasing demand and increasing energy efficiency. That's how you reduce the price of electricity.

Moreover, I am pleased to announce today that for the first time, the people in Ontario have paid off \$1.1 billion of the stranded debt from the old Ontario Hydro. That has never been done before.

Medicare defines us as a province and as a nation.

It's also a unique advantage when it comes to attracting jobs and investment.

It's why we've led the fight to prevent illness, including the ban on smoking in all enclosed public and work spaces; it's why we provided 2.1 million childhood vaccinations free of charge; it's why we have expanded access to doctors, nurses and other health care professionals; and it's why we've reduced wait times.

We're investing, this year, an additional \$1.9 billion in health care. Our total additional investment in health care will be \$34.4 billion over five years.

We have more to do. That's why I am pleased to announce that Ontario will now help families living with type 1 diabetes by funding insulin pumps and related supplies for about 6,500 children by 2008-09. The pumps will help to keep these children healthier and reduce emergency room visits. We're the first province in Canada to do this, and I hope every province will follow suit.

I would like to introduce two special guests in the gallery today: Zachary Smith and Alexander Tout. These young men and their families will benefit from this announcement, and when they benefit, we all benefit. Thank you for being here, Alex.

Terry Anne Thomson is also in the gallery today. She worked tirelessly to bring this issue forward. We all owe her a debt of gratitude.

I think my colleagues thank the honourable member from Thunder Bay-Superior North, Mr. Gravelle, who, typical of all members on all sides in this House, worked extremely hard on this issue. We congratulate you, Michael, and pay tribute to all members and the good work they do on behalf of their constituents.

We're also taking steps to prepare for the possibility of an influenza pandemic like avian flu.

For the first time in Ontario history, we have a Minister of Health Promotion dedicated to advocating healthy living and to developing programs that prevent illness and promote wellness.

We now have 100 family health teams approved in Ontario that will provide primary care to some 1.7 million Ontarians when fully operational. We're two thirds of the way toward our goal of 150 family health teams.

We have provided \$27 million in 2005-06, growing to \$35 million in 2006-07, to train up to 200 international medical graduates each and every year.

We are creating 104 undergraduate medical school spaces in Mississauga, Kitchener-Waterloo, St. Catharines and Windsor.

Surgical procedures are up and wait times are down.

Ontario's dedicated health professionals have carried out over 31,000 additional surgical procedures since 2004-05, including procedures that are most needed by Ontarians: cancer surgeries, hip and knee replacements, cataract and cardiac procedures.

—Wait times for radiation treatment are down by more than a week—an improvement of 16% over last year.

—As a result of investments in MRIs and their operating hours, we've had a 42% increase in the number of exams compared to 2003-04. That's over 100,000 additional exams in two years.

We have created 14 local health integration networks, which will deliver a more integrated, seamless and community-based health care system.

Since we took office, we have improved community-based health care facilities and added and improved long-term-care beds to address the needs of our aging population.

We have started construction at the new regional health centre in Peterborough and on a major redevelopment project at the Ottawa Hospital.

This year we will tender 11 major hospital projects in Belleville, in Ajax-Pickering, in London, in Mississauga, in Toronto, in Sarnia, in Hamilton, in Sudbury and in Sault Ste. Marie. This is in addition to the projects we've already started in Barrie, in Oshawa and in Sioux Lookout, to name just a few.

The best jobs and the most investment go to the places with the best-educated and most highly skilled workforce.

We are building educational opportunity every day.

As planned, our education funding will increase another \$424 million this year.

Ontario's Best Start plan to provide 25,000 new day-care spaces and increase subsidies for thousands of families was based on an early learning agreement with the federal government. Regrettably, the federal government has terminated the agreement, taking away \$1.4 billion intended for child care spaces and help for working families.

In spite of this, the province has already provided sufficient funding to create over 14,000 new spaces, and we will use the final federal payment to provide \$63 million every year for the next four years to support child care and make sure that those spaces stay open in Ontario.

We are building opportunity for school-age children:

—We've funded an additional 4,300 elementary and high school teachers over the past two years.

—More than half our schools have smaller primary classes.

—Literacy and math scores for grade 3 and 6 students have risen to an average of 62% from 54% just two and a half years ago.

—Six hundred specialist teachers are in classrooms to help struggling students and to teach physical education, music and the arts.

—We've invested \$61 million in extra funding for one million new textbooks and library resources.

Art, music and gym are back in our schools, along with proper textbooks, and we will never, ever let them be taken away again.

The centrepiece of last year's budget was the historic Reaching Higher plan for post-secondary education, a total of \$6.2 billion of new investment by 2009-10 for our colleges and universities.

1630

We are doubling spending on student aid.

We have reintroduced upfront grants and will provide them to 60,000 students this coming school year—up from 32,000 last year.

We will guarantee that students who receive government loans of more than \$7,000 per year will have the excess amount forgiven.

Finally, we are creating 75,000 new spaces for students in Ontario's colleges and universities this year.

We will only be at our best when every Ontarian has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

Reaching Higher is delivering real, positive change for 500,000 students. Our future depends on it.

When we speak of opportunity for every Ontarian, we mean every Ontarian.

In 2006-07, we will be increasing our spending to support Ontario's at-risk youth and vulnerable adults and families by \$218 million—to a total of \$10.3 billion.

We have already made much-needed improvements to social assistance. Today I'm announcing that we're permanently flowing through increases to the national child benefit supplement for 2004, 2005 and 2006.

Additionally, in 2006-07 we will increase social assistance basic benefits and maximum shelter allowances by another 2%.

These improvements will mean that a single-parent family with two children will receive \$1,620 more this year than they would have in 2003-04. That's an increase of 15.7%.

In 2006-07, we will also provide \$80 million more for people with developmental disabilities. I know the minister has great plans for that, and she'll have more to say about that in the none-too-distant future. We have also provided more funding to help women escape domestic violence and additional services to protect the homeless.

When it comes to stopping guns and gangs, we need to be tough on those who choose crime and to be tenacious when it comes to giving our youth every opportunity to choose a better path.

Many youth in high-needs communities require support and encouragement to complete high school. The government's Learning to 18 strategy will help young people stay and succeed in school.

As the Premier and "Pinball" Clemons announced last month, a new youth challenge fund will provide up to \$45 million in new resources for community-led programs targeted to young people.

Ontario's economy has created almost 200,000 net new jobs since we took office, about 90% of them full time—and most of them are in higher-paying occupations. That's an unprecedented record.

Our task is to ensure that Ontarians are better prepared for the great jobs that have been created in this province.

Notre tâche consiste à faire en sorte que les Ontariennes et Ontariens soient mieux préparés pour occuper d'excellents emplois.

That's why, in addition to Reaching Higher, we're creating a \$2.1-billion jobs and skills renewal strategy, a comprehensive plan to maintain and enhance Ontario's skills advantage.

Unemployed Ontarians and the working poor will have access to new training and employment supports and opportunities.

Apprentices and other skilled workers will receive more workforce training.

Social assistance recipients will get the work opportunities and the employment services they need.

New Canadians will have access to more and better language classes and bridge training programs.

At-risk youth will get employment counselling and participate in job placement and training programs.

This strategy will provide more opportunity for more Ontarians to participate more fully in our economy.

We know that the jurisdiction that is the first to come up with new ideas and the first to develop them into new products and services will have a prosperous economy and a high standard of living for all its citizens.

That's why we've created the Ministry of Research and Innovation, led by Premier McGuinty. Through this ministry, we will be investing nearly \$1.7 billion in research and commercialization over five years to 2009-10.

That's why we're investing in research and innovation talent, with three new innovation awards programs, and investing \$25 million in the Premier's summit awards for excellence in medical research.

And that's why we're providing \$100 million for foundation science through two leading-edge research facilities: the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in Waterloo and the University of Waterloo's Institute for Quantum Computing.

We are joined in the gallery today by Mr. Mike Lazaridis, our partner in this great endeavour. He and his family have contributed \$150 million of their own money to this, and we're there with you, sir. We believe in research and development, and we're proud to be your partner.

Ontario's economic strength also comes from the diversity of our economy.

La vigueur de l'économie ontarienne résulte aussi de la diversité de notre économie.

We are home to Canada's largest manufacturing sector, we are home to the continent's leading auto sector, we are home to the country's leading information and communications technology sector, and we are the hub of Canada's financial services sector.

To help the financial services sector flourish, we will continue with regulatory reform that fosters fair and effective financial markets, including the need for a single securities regulator in Canada.

To encourage this diverse economy, we must ensure the vitality of our investment climate.

A competitive tax system is essential to attract business investment and encourage economic growth.

This budget has no new taxes or tax increases.

In our 2004 budget, the government announced plans to enhance Ontario's investment climate by gradually phasing out the province's capital tax. That tax taxes investment rather than business profits.

So today we are proposing a 5% capital tax rate cut starting on January 1, 2007, a full two years earlier than planned.

If the fiscal plan allows, we intend to eliminate the capital tax in its entirety in 2010; again, two years sooner than originally planned. That's important to manufacturers in Welland who give jobs to the people of Welland, and I know they'll support this—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: —and we'll stand up against you and your likes any day of the week.

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Leave the workers of Welland alone, will you?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Member from Niagara Centre.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Increased capital investment will lead to more and better jobs, and that's what this government is about.

One of the many success stories of Ontario's diverse economy is the entertainment and creative cluster.

This cluster has great potential to grow and create jobs, and it boosts economic growth by attracting tourists, businesses and investors.

Today, we're proposing to extend the enhanced 18% tax credit rate for film production services to March 2007.

We're proposing to expand eligibility for the Ontario interactive digital media tax credit and increase the credit from 20% to 30% for smaller businesses.

1640

We're establishing an entertainment and creative cluster partnership fund—\$7.5 million over the next three years for skills development, product development and marketing.

We're supporting the 2007 Toronto International Arts Festival, which will highlight some of Ontario's cultural landmarks.

And I'm most proud to announce that we're providing a further \$49 million to support capital projects at the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the National Ballet School, the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Canadian Opera Company.

Those institutions are in our greatest city but they belong to all the people of Ontario and they'll attract investment and jobs for many, many people and a lot of tourism dollars to boot.

Our manufacturing sector accounts for about 17% of Ontario's employment and 21% of our gross domestic product.

In 2005, Ontario's manufacturing sector came under increased competitive pressure due to a higher Canadian dollar and higher oil costs.

In Ontario, industry is rising to the challenge: production and exports are up, productivity is higher and investment is increasing. That bodes well for our recovery in the manufacturing sector. That bodes well for the working people of this province.

Ontario's strategy for automotive investment has leveraged almost \$6 billion in investment in this sector, including the new Toyota plant in Woodstock.

Today I'm proud to propose a doubling of our maximum retail sales tax rebate for the purchase of hybrid electric vehicles to \$2,000.

The Ford Motor Co., as a result of Joe Cordiano's good work, is investing and is going to build hybrids in Ontario for the first time, and we're proud to be a partner in that.

Our \$500-million advanced manufacturing investment strategy, our Reaching Higher plan, our investments in infrastructure, innovation and commercialization, and the elimination of the capital tax will help manufacturing maintain its role as a mainstay of our economy and keep the good people of Welland working.

Ontario's farming sector employs 90,000 people and feeds our cities and towns.

While prospects for the sector overall are positive, some farmers face serious challenges. When there is a problem on the family farm, we all have a problem.

Ontario farmers need our help, and they are receiving it with more than \$800 million over the last three years for farm income stabilization and support programs. This includes our recent \$125-million announcement, part of the year-end money that you opposed, to help farmers right across the province.

The grain and oilseed farmers, horticulture farmers and livestock industry have all benefited from this, and it's time for the federal government to come to the table with our farming community here in Ontario, the way that Ontario has. Get on the phone and call them today to make sure they're there with us, investing in this vital sector.

Research is the most cost-effective support for agriculture. So over the next five years, \$2.5 million will be awarded to outstanding farm innovators. The first awards will be presented at the next Premier's agri-food summit.

I'm also announcing today \$25 million for the re-development of the animal health laboratory at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph to increase our capacity to research diseases like avian flu.

Ontario's research scientists can be assured that this government will stand behind them, because when they advance the frontiers of science, we advance the interests of all the people of Ontario, and that is a worthy public endeavour.

It is this province's communities that deliver so many of the programs and services that make a difference in people's everyday lives.

We believe in Ontario's municipalities. We've unloaded where others have downloaded.

Nous avons assumé des responsabilités alors que d'autres en ont abandonné.

We recently increased our supports to municipalities for land ambulance services. That's paid for out of the year-end funding, and we are surprised that you would oppose that. The province will spend an additional \$300 million over the next three years toward a true 50-50 cost share of a program that you downloaded.

We have demonstrated our support for municipalities today:

- \$1.2 billion in Move Ontario funding for transit, roads and bridges;

- gas tax revenues of more than \$1.4 billion over five years;

- \$763 million through the Ontario municipal partnership fund in 2006;

- up to \$2.4 billion through Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority loan commitments;

- a \$298-million commitment to renew municipal infrastructure through the Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund; and finally,

- with the year-end money we have this year, we're able to increase the share of public health funding to 65% this year and 75% next year.

Won't you please join us in helping our municipalities deal with the costs that you downloaded?

Northern Ontario is a region of great potential.

I am delighted to announce today \$4 million to create a bio-energy research centre in Atikokan to conduct practical research on energy for the province and the community and to keep the Atikokan research centre up and running. Bill Mauro deserves a lot of credit for that, and for keeping our toes to the fire. This is good news for Atikokan today.

Provincial investments in support of prosperity for northern Ontario include:

- \$1.8 billion over five years for the upgrading and expansion of northern highways under the northern Ontario highway strategy; and

- \$259 million in low-cost loans from OSIFA to 47 northern municipalities for upgrading local infrastructure.

To help support the forestry industry, in 2005 the government announced \$680 million in assistance.

We recently announced a number of new investments totalling \$220 million over three years. Again, that's part

of that year-end money and those expenditures you opposed. That will keep Ontario's forest companies secure and create jobs. When the forestry industry hurts, not just the north hurts; this entire province hurts. That's why their government is standing behind that vital sector.

Mineral exploration spending in Ontario has nearly tripled since 2001, and there is a new diamond mine opening in Ontario, the first in our history.

I'm pleased to announce that this year we are investing \$10 million in Sudbury's Centre for Excellence in Mining Innovation.

We're announcing new initiatives for aboriginal peoples, many of whom live in the north.

1650

We're providing \$6 million to First Nations and rural libraries to help strengthen literacy and promote lifelong learning.

And I'm very proud to announce that we're providing over \$800,000 for the Lieutenant Governor's summer camp initiative that encourages literacy for our aboriginal children.

Our plan to build opportunity is working because we've been prudent fiscal managers.

We have made substantial progress on deficit reduction. We've reduced the deficit we inherited by 75% in two and a half years.

We have reduced the 2005-06 deficit to a projected \$1.4 billion, an improvement of almost \$200 million from 2004-05.

We estimate that the 2006-07 deficit will be \$2.4 billion—\$1.4 billion if the reserve is not needed. We are on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit by 2008-09, or a year earlier if the reserve is not needed.

Prudence is important in a budget. The last time we didn't have it, we found a deficit of \$5.5 billion. This government is about proper financial management.

The performance of the economy is vital to our fiscal plan.

The Ontario economy has added over 81,000 net new jobs in 2005, and we forecast another 85,000 net new jobs in 2006.

Private sector forecasters, on average, expect Ontario to see real GDP growth of 2.6% in 2006 and 2007.

Though we are optimistic about economic growth in Ontario, there are always risks that are beyond our control, including slower US economic growth, rising oil prices, and a higher Canadian dollar.

Our job—and it's one that we take very seriously—is to ensure that Ontario's economy is in the strongest shape possible to withstand these external challenges.

The new federal government has expressed a willingness to address the federal-provincial fiscal imbalance. Our government is optimistic about the potential positive outcome for Ontarians.

In making our case to the federal government, we will be stressing the importance of investment in infrastructure, in shorter wait times, in post-secondary education, in early learning and child care, in our municipalities, and

in support, most importantly, to our farmers and forestry industries.

We need the federal government to help build a strong Ontario in a strong Canada by continuing to narrow the \$23-billion gap between what Ontarians contribute to Confederation and what we receive back in transfers and programs.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank a very dedicated team of public servants in the Ministry of Finance who have worked tirelessly to prepare this budget. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of them and, through them, to the entire public service in Ontario. We should all be proud of our public service. They're outstanding professionals.

The English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon once said that wise people make more opportunities than they find.

What we found when we assumed office was a health care deficit, an education and skills deficit, a fiscal deficit and an infrastructure deficit.

What we have done is turn these challenges into opportunities.

Under our plan, and thanks to the efforts of hard-working Ontarians:

Wait times are down, and the number of nurses is up.

Dropout rates are going down, and test scores are going up.

With the approach we're putting in place today, commute and travel times will come down as the quality and quantity of our highways, subways, roads and bridges go up.

Interest on the debt, the debt as a percentage of GDP, and the fiscal deficit we all inherited are down.

And take-home pay, corporate profits, jobs and high-paying jobs are all up, up, up.

There is much more to do, but the deficits we inherited are, one by one, being knocked down.

We are privileged to serve the people. They are one, by one, being lifted up.

Their education and skills are stronger.

Their health care is better.

And their prosperity is deeper.

And that means more and more Ontarians will have a fair shot at success, and more and more Ontarians are finding success.

That's what happens when we, as the Premier says, work and grow and dream together.

That's what happens when we build opportunity for all.

Chi meegwetch. Thank you.

Applause.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Simcoe-Grey.

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): I move adjournment of the debate.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I request that the House revert to introduction of bills.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS**BUDGET MEASURES ACT, 2006****LOI DE 2006 SUR LES MESURES
BUDGÉTAIRES**

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to implement 2006 Budget measures and to enact, amend or repeal various Acts / Projet de loi 81, Loi mettant en oeuvre certaines mesures énoncées dans le Budget de 2006 et édictant, modifiant ou abrogeant diverses lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the minister wish to make a brief statement?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I just did one, sir. Thank you.

The Speaker: Introduction of bills? The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I have a message from His Honour.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Further debate? The government House leader.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock, Monday afternoon.

The House adjourned at 1700.

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Broten, Hon. / L'hon. Laurel C. (L)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	Minister of the Environment / ministre de l'Environnement
Brown, Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. (L)	Algoma–Manitoulin	Speaker / Président
Brownell, Jim (L)	Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Tourism / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Tourisme
Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L)	St. Paul's	Attorney General / procureur général
Cansfield, Hon. / L'hon. Donna H. (L)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	Minister of Energy / ministre de l'Énergie
Caplan, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy government House leader / ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L)	Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Chudleigh, Ted (PC)	Halton	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Colle, Hon. / L'hon. Mike (L)	Eglinton–Lawrence	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Craitor, Kim (L)	Niagara Falls	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services (Correctional Services) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels (Services correctionnels)
Crozier, Bruce (L)	Essex	Deputy Speaker, Chair of the committee of the whole House / Vice-Président, Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Delaney, Bob (L)	Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for seniors / adjoint parlementaire au ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Dhillon, Vic (L)	Brampton West–Mississauga / Brampton-Ouest–Mississauga	
Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	Sarnia–Lambton	Parliamentary assistant to the Premier / adjointe parlementaire au premier ministre
Dombrowsky, Hon. / L'hon. Leona (L)	Hastings–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Duguid, Brad (L)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Municipal Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Affaires municipales)
Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Oakville	Parliamentary assistant to the minister responsible for democratic renewal / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre responsable du Renouveau démocratique
Fonseca, Peter (L)	Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Gerretsen, Hon. / L'hon. John (L)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les îles	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
Gravelle, Michael (L)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	
Hampton, Howard (ND)	Kenora–Rainy River	Leader of the New Democratic Party / chef du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Horwath, Andrea (ND)	Hamilton East / Hamilton-Est	
Hoy, Pat (L)	Chatham–Kent Essex	
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Erie–Lincoln	
Jackson, Cameron (PC)	Burlington	
Jeffrey, Linda (L)	Brampton Centre / Brampton-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse
Kennedy, Hon. / L'hon. Gerard (L)	Parkdale–High Park	Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation
Klees, Frank (PC)	Oak Ridges	
Kormos, Peter (ND)	Niagara Centre / Niagara-Centre	New Democratic Party House leader / leader parlementaire du Nouveau Parti démocratique
Kular, Kuldip (L)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Leal, Jeff (L)	Peterborough	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Énergie
Levac, Dave (L)	Brant	Chief government whip / whip en chef du gouvernement
Marchese, Rosario (ND)	Trinity–Spadina	
Marsales, Judy (L)	Hamilton West / Hamilton-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Trade (Small Business) / adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce (Petites entreprises)
Martel, Shelley (ND)	Nickel Belt	
Martiniuk, Gerry (PC)	Cambridge	
Matthews, Deborah (L)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services and minister responsible for women's issues / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires et ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Mauro, Bill (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
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Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L)	Ottawa–Vanier	Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	Chief opposition whip / whip en chef de l'opposition
Milloy, John (L)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
Mitchell, Carol (L)	Huron–Bruce	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal / adjointe parlementaire au ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique
Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)	Stoney Creek	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Culture and minister responsible for francophone affairs / adjointe parlementaire à la ministre de la Culture et ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Munro, Julia (PC)	York North / York-Nord	Deputy opposition whip / whip adjoint de l'opposition
Murdoch, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
O'Toole, John (PC)	Durham	
Oraziotti, David (L)	Sault Ste. Marie	
Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Oshawa	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources and minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Richesses naturelles et ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Parsons, Ernie (L)	Prince Edward–Hastings	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services (Disabilities) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires (Personnes handicapées)
Patten, Richard (L)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Peters, Hon. / L'hon. Steve (L)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	Minister of Labour / ministre du Travail
Peterson, Tim (L)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L)	Scarborough–Agincourt	Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Prue, Michael (ND)	Beaches–East York / Beaches–York-Est	Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Qaadri, Shafiq (L)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Racco, Mario G. (L)	Thornhill	
Ramal, Khalil (L)	London–Fanshawe	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Labour / adjoint parlementaire au ministre du Travail
		Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires civiles et de l'Immigration
		Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Northumberland	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Rural Affairs) / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales (Affaires rurales)
Runciman, Robert W. (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House leader / leader parlementaire de l'opposition
Ruprecht, Tony (L)	Davenport	
Sandals, Liz (L)	Guelph–Wellington	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Government Services / adjointe parlementaire au ministre des Services gouvernementaux
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Victoria–Brock	
Sergio, Mario (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing (Housing) / adjoint parlementaire au ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement (Logement)
Smith, Monique M. (L)	Nipissing	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / adjointe parlementaire au ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L)	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
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Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé
Wilkinson, John (L)	Perth–Middlesex	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment / adjoint parlementaire à la ministre de l'Environnement
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Deputy opposition House leader / leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition
Witmer, Elizabeth (PC)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Wong, Tony C. (L)	Markham	Parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Research and Innovation / adjoint parlementaire au ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
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Norman W. Sterling, Kathleen O.Wynne
Clerk / Greffière: Anne Stokes

These lists appear in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month. A list arranged by riding appears when space permits.

Ces listes figurent dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et du premier lundi de chaque mois. Par contre, une liste des circonscriptions paraît si l'espace est disponible.

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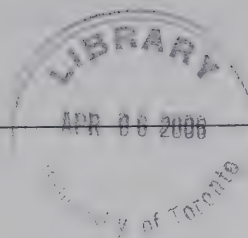
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N° 49

ISSN 1180-2987



**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**
Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Monday 27 March 2006

Lundi 27 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 27 March 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

ESTIMATES

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr. Speaker, I have a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, signed by his own hand.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending March 31, 2006, and recommends them to the Legislative Assembly.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE FUNDING

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): One hundred and fifty thousand full-time and 350,000 part-time college students will be returning to class in the next two days, three weeks after their teachers went on strike, having been without a contract since last summer. During that time, the McGuinty government chose to sit on their hands, and its first response was to raise tuition fees on the second day of the strike.

The Premier told the Ottawa Citizen on March 10, "Don't count on the government to intervene in this matter." For 10 days, while half a million students sat waiting to go back to school, the Premier and his minister did nothing. On March 15, the Toronto Star told the minister to take PC leader John Tory's advice to call both sides together and resume bargaining talks.

Last year, McGuinty was buying labour peace and education with a blank cheque; this year's strategy was to get tough with labour, and the college students are the ones paying for the Premier's new makeover.

What's worse, college students are asking, "Where is the promised post-secondary education funding, and why does the McGuinty government continue to widen the funding gap between colleges and universities?" For every operating dollar that Ontario colleges receive, universities get about \$2.73, creating a growing gap of more than \$1.5 billion. This gap has widened by 45% since the McGuinty government took office.

Despite what this government says, the facts are very clear. The Liberal strategy continues to impoverish col-

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Lundi 27 mars 2006

leges over universities, since Ontario colleges are still dead last in per capita funding behind each and every province in Canada.

PEEL REGIONAL POLICE

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I rise in the House today with great pride to acknowledge what I believe to be one of the greatest police services in the province, the Peel Regional Police. As a resident and member representing the riding of Mississauga East, I know the level of hard work and dedication with which the Peel Regional Police serve the community.

Having participated in a ride-along with the police last fall, I've experienced first hand their professionalism and commitment to the communities they serve. However, you don't have to take my word for it. I stand before the House today because the Peel Regional Police has been recognized as a flagship organization by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. The commission is an international organization that evaluates police services. Their flagship program acknowledges the achievement and expertise of the most successful commission-accredited public safety agencies.

Peel Regional Police is one of only 10 flagship police organizations worldwide. Peel Regional Police became this province's first commission-accredited police service in 1994. Peel was reaccredited by the commission in 1999, 2002 and again in 2005, joining the ranks of just under 1,000 accredited police services around the world.

I think it is not only important to acknowledge the Peel police for their outstanding achievement, but also to take a moment to thank the men and women who serve on police forces all across our great province.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): Dalton McGuinty promised to make agriculture a lead ministry, but his Minister of Finance just cut the agriculture budget by 21%. That works out to \$224 million less than last year, which was \$167 million less than the year before. This budget tells the rest of the province that Mr. McGuinty doesn't need rural Ontario. Apart from cutting agriculture spending by 21%, I repeat, there was nothing in the budget for the 650,000 jobs dependent on agribusiness.

For weeks Stephen Webster, a dairy heifer exporter, has been camping out in front of Queen's Park. Last week, as we know, farmers descended on Queen's Park

for the budget. All we get is the blame game. We're told to go to Ottawa.

The protests consist of the usual signs: "Farmers Feed Cities," "Equity with US Farmers," "Study, Stall, Study."

The Minister of Finance will be in Whitby tomorrow for the by-election. He'll be met with the farmers he insulted and neglected on Thursday. At 11 o'clock, at the Whitby Curling Club—that's at 815 Brock Street North—there will be another sign. The word "farm" has taken on a new meaning for this McGuinty government: F-A-R-M. Tomorrow those letters will stand for "Forget About Re-election McGuinty."

GEORGE ASSALY

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): Today the community of Cornwall and many others along the St. Lawrence River will pay their final respects to George Assaly, a dedicated businessman, tireless community advocate and true gentleman.

Born in 1925, George had the distinction of serving in all three branches of service during the Second World War, an early indication of his lifelong habit of getting involved in every capacity he could, in any project he believed in. His efforts saw him decorated with the Citizen of the Year Award for his home community of Cornwall, the Businessman Achievement Award, the Chamber of Commerce Lifetime Achievement Award, the National Shoe Council of Canada, the Helen Keller Award and many others.

Even when diagnosed with terminal cancer, George would not give up his community involvement, giving 110% every day to the St. Lawrence Parks Commission, of which he was chair, and to the community he loved so dearly.

His daughter, Jo Ann Langstaff, called him "friend"; his fellow businessman and Lions Club member Paul Lefebvre called him "a fantastic person"; our colleague Jim Brownell considered him a mentor. As a visionary, he worked hard as an advocate for the Cornwall Heart of the City project. To all those whose lives he touched, he will be remembered as truly being the heart of the city of Cornwall.

Repose en paix, George. Tu l'as bien mérité.

1340

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I am very pleased to rise on behalf of the citizens of Durham and put on the record, as was stated in the Toronto Star, "Durham Wonders Why it Was Excluded" from last Thursday's budget.

I say to the Premier as well as to the Minister of Finance today that there are three critical areas that should have been addressed and were not addressed in this budget. One of them would be agriculture, which the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant has alluded to in referring to the dismal effort in recognition of the hard,

patient and respectful protests that were here at Queen's Park. You simply refused to listen. You have no plan for agriculture; that's clear.

Another one was the hospital strategy. You know that Lakeridge Health is one of the few hospitals serving a growing population. There wasn't one cent in this budget to recognize the growth pressures not just in Durham but in the GTA. You know that the funding per capita is the lowest in this province. You have no plan for health in Durham region.

Another issue that I think is going to be discussed this afternoon, and it's a shame, is the transit debate. The transit issue in Durham, as Roger Anderson said—"Durham region is one of the fastest-growing regions within the GTA and yet there was no mention at all for transportation issues to be dealt with" in this budget.

Minister, I say to you, and to the Minister of Transportation as well, Durham has a plan. We're a fast-growing region, and certainly this government here has no plan.

I say to the people of Durham, and specifically to the Whitby–Ajax riding, they can send a message this Thursday by looking at Christine Elliott—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. Members' statements.

SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): Ce qui commence d'être de plus en plus clair, avec des années de ce gouvernement McGuinty, est que la communauté francophone se trouve de plus en plus laissée en arrière quand ça vient aux services pour la communauté francophone. Moi, je vois, comme critique en matière des Affaires francophones pour le parti néo-démocratique, des agences à travers la province qui me disent qu'elles ont des problèmes, et quand elles apportent leurs problèmes aux ministères pour les faire régler, ils disent qu'il n'y a rien à faire; quand elles appellent la ministre, M^{me} Meilleur, ou d'autres ministres pour régler leurs problèmes de financement ou des problèmes en outre, ceux-ci sont dans la même situation, qu'il n'y a rien qu'on puisse faire.

Deuxièmement, ce qu'on voit avec le délestage des services de la province aux municipalités est que de plus en plus d'agences qui ont reçu ces services se trouvent dans une situation où elles donnent des services, et des fois—oops—elles oublient de les donner en français. Même dans un comté comme le mien, Timmins–Baie James, où on est dans la majorité, il y a certaines occasions où on se trouve, avec des agences qui ont reçu des services délestés, sans services en français.

Je dis à ce gouvernement que vous avez une responsabilité, et non seulement sous la Loi 8 mais aussi envers vos engagements de la dernière élection que l'on a eue il y a deux ans et demi. On vous demande de garder votre promesse et de nous assurer que les services en français soient respectés non seulement provenant de la province mais aussi ceux qui ont été délestés par le gouvernement provincial aux municipalités ou autres. Ce qu'on trouve

est complètement le contraire : un gouvernement qui oublie ses engagements.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion likes Ontario's 2006-07 budget. Madam Mayor's thoughts bear repeating: "I think it was a very positive budget—extremely positive. Today was a good day for Ontario, in my opinion. It's a step in the right direction. As I've often said to the Premier, you can't turn things around overnight, but if you can see progress to try to offset the costs that have been downloaded to municipalities, I think it's a great step forward."

Mississauga needs to move without choking on our volume of cars and their exhaust. Through \$65 million of funding in Move Ontario, the government of Ontario will assist Mississauga with its bus rapid transit, enabling people to not only park the car in Mississauga but skip the traffic en route to work. That's a great step forward.

GO Transit has scheduled the start of the new Ligar GO train station to begin this year, and an additional \$25 million for this and other projects are in GO's budget. That's a great step forward.

Credit Valley Hospital, Trillium Health Centre and the University of Toronto at Mississauga are working together to train the new doctors our community needs so much. That's a great step forward.

This 2006-07 Ontario budget accomplishes this and so much more, and it does it without any new taxes or any increase in existing taxes. That's a great step forward.

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): I'm proud to stand today to show my support for the 2006 budget. This budget clearly builds on the priorities of this government: to improve the Ontario advantage by investing in infrastructure, health and education while staying on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit we inherited.

One of the cornerstones of the 2006 budget is the \$1.2-billion Move Ontario plan. My community of London gets more than \$14.3 million to repair and build roads and bridges: \$14.3 million towards safer roads for London drivers. It also, of course, means more jobs.

Public transportation in London will continue to improve with the existing gas tax investment. In 2004-05, gas tax funding for London was \$4.5 million. This year it increased to \$6.8 million, and it's expected to increase again next year. This funding is critically important for my community because it means a public transit system that moves quickly, safely and efficiently.

We're also investing in cities through the Ontario municipal partnership fund. Over the last two years, London has received over \$26 million. Previous to that, it was zero.

This budget shows a commitment to responsible spending and improving the lives of all Ontarians in every part of Ontario. Every community, including London, will benefit from this budget. I'm proud to be

part of a government that has delivered a budget that speaks to all Ontarians.

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): I am proud to rise in this House today to recognize the positive support that we have received from the mayor of Hamilton with our 2006-07 Ontario budget. To quote the front page of the Hamilton Spectator, Mayor Di Ianni said, "We have a lot to be thankful for." In a political arena generally charged by negative commentary, our mayor demonstrated true leadership in recognizing the sincere efforts the McGuinty government has made to address some of the challenges currently being faced by one of Ontario's most historic and dynamic cities.

The Ontario government has committed more than \$42 million to Hamilton. The budget answered Hamilton's request for special funding that will address the social service costs as well as acknowledge the infrastructure needs of a mature city with crumbling roads and bridges. Funds are also being forwarded to Hamilton that will assist with their transit, health, and education needs. All this will contribute to the city of Hamilton's bottom line.

Mayor Di Ianni has been quoted as saying that this is a community budget that is needed and that our community has been well treated by the Ontario government.

The Hamilton that my colleagues and I envision will be self-sustaining, innovative, creative, diverse and, above all, a healthy and successful community. The McGuinty government is giving us the support to achieve our dream, and we say thank you.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I rise today to tell you and the members of the House about a great accomplishment by a very special member of this House.

On March 9, the member for London North Centre successfully defended her doctoral thesis in social demography at the University of Western Ontario. Deb returned to the University of Western Ontario as a mature student—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. I am certain that a member's statement will take care of that on a future date.

1350

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would ask the indulgence of the House to allow the pages to assemble for their introduction.

From Hamilton East we have Elyse Airth; from Essex, Justin Barrette; from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Charlotte Curley; from Timmins-James Bay, Zacharie Fogal; Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Shelby Heinbuch; London North Centre, Ben Hyland; from Don Valley East, Sharmarke Ismail; from Thornhill, Cameron Jesudasan; Kitchener-Waterloo, McKenzie Kibler; Timiskaming-Cochrane, Raelene Knight; from St. Paul's, Olga Krakovna; Mercedes Mabee is from Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey; from Sudbury, Mark Mancini; from Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, Meghan Rourke; Ottawa

West-Nepean, Trevor Sadler; Halton, Andrew Sturrock; from Stoney Creek, Maura Wasilewski; from Parkdale-High Park, Leah Watson; from Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, Jenna Zwambag; and from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Roman Zyla.

Let us congratulate our pages.

Applause.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I would like to acknowledge in the members' west gallery a former member of this House who served in the 28th, 29th, 30th and 31st Parliaments: Ian Deans from Wentworth.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SUPPLY ACT, 2006

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2006

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006 / *Projet de loi 82, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2006.*

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Does the minister have a statement?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): No.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Oraziotti and Mr. Wilkinson exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Oraziotti assumes ballot item 37 and Mr. Wilkinson assumes ballot item 51.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a

motion without notice regarding the membership of certain committees.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bradley: I move that the following substitutions be made to the membership of certain committees:

On the standing committee on estimates, Mr. Wilkinson replaces Mr. Kular, and Mr. Zimmer replaces Mr. Milloy; on the standing committee on finance and economic affairs, Mrs. Sandals replaces Mr. Wilkinson; on the standing committee on general government, Mr. Brownell replaces Mr. Dhillon, and Mr. Flynn replaces Ms. Matthews; on the standing committee on government agencies, Mr. Milloy replaces Mr. Berardinetti, and Mr. Wilkinson replaces Mr. Oraziotti; on the standing committee on justice policy, Mr. Balkissoon replaces Mr. Brownell, Mr. Berardinetti replaces Mr. Delaney, Mr. Dhillon replaces Mr. Flynn, Mr. McMeekin replaces Ms. Mossop, Mr. Oraziotti replaces Mr. Qaadri, and Mrs. Van Bommel replaces Mr. Racco; on the standing committee on the Legislative Assembly, Ms. Mossop replaces Mr. Balkissoon; on the standing committee on public accounts, Ms. Matthews replaces Mr. Balkissoon; on the standing committee on regulations and private bills, Mr. Levac replaces Mr. Kular, and Mr. Sergio replaces Mrs. Van Bommel; on the standing committee on social policy, Mr. Kular replaces Mr. Craiton, and Mr. Qaadri replaces Mr. Racco; on the standing committee on public accounts, Ms. Matthews replaces Mrs. Sandals.

The Speaker: Mr. Bradley has moved that the following substitutions be made to the membership of certain committees—

Interjection: Dispense.

The Speaker: Dispense? Dispense.

Shall the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I rise to share news about a landmark event with all members of the House. Earlier today, I participated with our colleague from Toronto Centre-Rosedale, Minister Smitherman, in the launch of work on an historic groundbreaking on the west Don lands, one of the most important urban revitalization projects in the province of Ontario.

Toronto's west Don lands is a waterfront precinct as big as London's Canary Wharf, or as large as New York city's Battery Park. I am confident that it will become one of the most dynamic neighbourhoods in the city of

Toronto. Where derelict buildings stand today, people will be living, working and shopping. Where there are barren lots, children will play in parks and pools and have access to daycare centres. This affordable, accessible community will attract families from diverse economic backgrounds. It will be Toronto's first major sustainable community in years, and it's being built on land owned by the people of Ontario.

1400

The 80-acre west Don lands is Ontario's top waterfront revitalization priority, the centrepiece of a 2,000-acre waterfront project. This government has shown strong leadership and support for the revitalization of the west Don lands and for Toronto's waterfront.

Last September, I was honoured to sign the west Don lands memorandum of understanding, making the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corp. the master developer and setting out an important collaborative role for our land agency, the Ontario Realty Corp., in supporting those revitalization efforts. Ontario is the first jurisdiction to put together such an agreement with the waterfront corporation.

This government will also be introducing legislation, as outlined by the finance minister in the budget presentation on Thursday, to enable tax increment financing to assist, finally, with brownfield redevelopment and public infrastructure investment. This new municipal fiscal tool would be introduced on a pilot basis, allowing for its prudent review. If the legislation passes, one of the pilots would be the west Don lands. The west Don lands is an example of how our government believes modern communities should grow, as outlined in the growth plan for the greater Golden Horseshoe, to be released later this spring. It follows the important principles of growth planning, from affordable housing to brownfield revitalization and transit-oriented development. The west Don lands project symbolizes our commitment to the restoration of Ontario's public infrastructure.

The McGuinty government inherited an enormous infrastructure deficit, and we delivered and developed a comprehensive \$30-billion ReNew Ontario investment plan to address how we will pay down that deficit. Now, today, we have begun to implement this plan. Just as work begins at the west Don lands, so too are shovels going into the ground in over 2,000 infrastructure renewal projects across this province. This makes me incredibly proud, both as Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal and as a resident of the city of Toronto.

Speaker, thank you very much.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I rise in the House today to talk about something vital to everyone in Ontario: the state of our roads and bridges. As my colleague Mr. Duncan pointed out in tabling his budget last week, quick, reliable and safe transportation is vital to our economic success and quality of life.

Our government has made the safety and reliability of Ontario's transportation infrastructure a priority. We have created Move Ontario, a new one-time \$1.2-billion

investment in Ontario's public transit system and municipal roads and bridges.

I was pleased to be in Mississauga last Friday with the Premier to announce \$65 million for the Mississauga Transitway. This is on top of the \$25 million that GO Transit is contributing to this project.

We want to help move people and goods faster, create jobs and build a stronger economy. Move Ontario means \$670 million to extend the TTC subway to York region, \$95 million for the Brampton AcceleRide program, and \$400 million for municipalities primarily outside of the GTA.

We have listened to municipal leaders in communities across the province who have asked for more money to help repair and upgrade roads and bridges. This is a one-time \$400-million investment that municipalities may use for these kinds of projects, communities such as Hastings county, which will receive more than \$1.6 million; London, which will receive more than \$14.3 million; Hamilton, nearly \$21 million; Sault Ste. Marie, nearly \$4.7 million; Kitchener, more than \$4 million; and Ottawa, nearly \$33 million. Our investment is spread across the province, with an emphasis on rural and northern communities.

I know that municipal leaders in Durham region will be happy to hear that the region will receive more than \$10.7 million.

These communities will determine their own priorities, including how and when to spend the funding. It will be provided immediately so that high-priority projects can be accommodated as soon as possible.

Move Ontario is in addition to other major programs that support municipal infrastructure, programs such as the \$900-million Canada-Ontario municipal rural infrastructure fund and the Ontario Strategic Infrastructure Financing Authority.

Move Ontario projects are in addition to our five-year, \$30-billion ReNew Ontario infrastructure plan.

Let me also remind the honourable members that ours is the first Ontario government to offer municipalities a reliable and stable source of transit funding. The provincial gas tax program is a huge success and is now into its second year. As of October 1, 2005, we increased funding from one cent to one and a half cents for every litre of gasoline sold in Ontario. This year, 83 transit systems, serving 110 municipalities, will share \$232 million in gas tax funding. That is up from the \$156 million we gave in the first year of the program.

I'm proud that Ontario has the safest roads in North America. Our government is committed to maintaining and improving upon that record.

We are doing what needs to be done to help communities across the province ensure that Ontario's roads, bridges and transit infrastructure are among the best in the world.

Here is what people are saying about Move Ontario. The president of the Canadian Urban Transit Association, Michael Roschlau, says, "These transit projects will help ease congestion and air quality and improve the economic vitality of Ontario's communities."

The president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Len Crispino, says, "Border, urban and northern communities will all benefit from this government's focus on improving infrastructure."

The president of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Roger Anderson, says, "Funding for municipal roads, bridges and public transit is welcome news."

Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion calls our budget a "very progressive budget."

The chair of the Toronto Transit Commission, Howard Moscoe, says, "It's great news, terrific for transit, and what we are seeing is the government honour its promises, and that is great."

A news release from the CAA says, "This budget shows that motorists matter."

I am sure that all members also will support Move Ontario and agree that quick, reliable and safe transportation is vital to our economic success and quality of life. It's vital to ensuring that the \$1.2 trillion worth of goods carried on Ontario highways every year get to market on time. It's vital to ensuring that we spend more time with our families, doing the things that really matter to all of us.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

RENOUVEAU DÉMOCRATIQUE

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I rise today to tell this House of an important step in advancing the most ambitious democratic renewal agenda in Ontario's history. In order for Ontario to be strong, our democracy has to be strong. Our government is taking the necessary steps to renew Ontario's democracy and make it stronger.

This morning, I launched the next step in our ambitious democratic renewal agenda. I announced the process for the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and introduced the chair.

L'Assemblée des citoyens donnera aux Ontariens et Ontariennes, pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Ontario, la possibilité de participer à un débat ouvert et complet sur notre système électoral.

1410

That was my first time in French.

At the end of the process, the assembly will make a recommendation on which electoral system they think would best serve our province. If the assembly recommends a change to our current first-past-the-post electoral system, then we'll put that recommendation to a province-wide referendum.

The assembly will be comprised of 103 Ontarians chosen at random from the permanent register of electors by Elections Ontario. It will be made up of 52 women and 51 men—one person from each of Ontario's ridings. At least one member of the assembly will be of aboriginal ancestry. All members will contribute their unique perspectives, their creativity, their talent and their range of experience to the work of the assembly.

The assembly will be a citizen-led process of learning, listening and deliberating. Beginning in September, the members of the assembly will gather at Osgoode Hall Law School's state-of-the-art moot court facility at York University two weekends a month. Together they will learn about our system and others. They will consult with a broad cross-section of Ontarians and they will determine whether they want to recommend that Ontario keep its current electoral system or exchange it for another. They will issue that recommendation on or before May 15, 2007.

With today's announcement, our government is clearly communicating its belief that the shape of Ontario's democracy is a matter for Ontarians to decide and that the role of the government is to ensure that the public's voice is heard loud and clear and that the will of the people is implemented. An undertaking of this magnitude requires tremendous skill to bring it to fruition, so I was very pleased this morning to announce that when the assembly meets this fall it will be under the skilled guidance of Mr. George Thomson, who was appointed chair of the citizens' assembly by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

George Thomson brings a lifetime of public service, a commitment to social justice and a strong reputation as a leader in education and public policy to his work with the assembly. Throughout his distinguished professional life as a lawyer, a teacher, a judge and a deputy minister with the provincial and federal governments, George has built a reputation for fairness, integrity and inclusiveness. In his role as chair he will oversee and facilitate the work of the assembly. He will also lead the independent citizens' assembly secretariat, which will support the operation of the assembly process. In the months ahead, under Mr. Thomson's leadership, all Ontarians will be invited to participate in this unprecedented examination of our democracy.

Cet examen, j'en suis sûre, nous permettra de mieux comprendre la démocratie et son impact sur notre société.

That is an exciting day for Ontario. It marks that this launch of a historic process will empower citizens as never before and determine the shape of our democracy going forward. Thank you. Merci.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): Briefly, the minister of infrastructure renewal was talking today about the west Don lands improvement. I would support that. I think that every one of us here would like to see a more beautiful waterfront, but what they really say here is another promise, and when the Liberals promise something you've got to be very suspicious.

What they don't want to talk about is the by-election in Toronto-Danforth. In Toronto-Danforth they're fighting the issue of the port lands, and I think this is a bit of a deflection announcement today to take the attention off.

It's well evidenced that Ben Chin is taking a beating, and technically I think the only clear choice is Georgina Blanas in that riding.

What I'd like to say on the Minister of Transportation's announcement: It's yet another promise. He mentioned in his remarks several times that it's \$1.2 billion of one-time funding. The money's there, but there's no delivery. It was an old saying, an axiom, that if something is true you can observe it, and in this case, all the Liberal promises—you can never envision, you can't even see, any of the actualization of that infrastructure on the ground. The plan is too cute by half. In fact, one of the reports in the media was cited: "The subway expansion is a mirage." That pretty well sums it up. Most of the promises are post-dated cheques beyond the next election.

Getting down to the real commitments, what I hear on my commute every day is more gridlock. He promised that the routes would be quicker. Well, they're slower. I've seen rising transit fares right across the board—on GO Transit, TTC. My constituents in Durham are outraged. There's the leaked budget information on the transportation announcement, which I'm sure will be debated in this House, and there's the suggestion of interference on the Windsor border file as well by certain members of cabinet.

The GTTA, the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, is perhaps a good idea, but with a questionable composition, a questionable mandate and questionable funding. We'll certainly hear more about that in the future.

If I even look at the comment on the \$400 million committed to rural Ontario, in fact, one of the reeves said, "By the time you divvy" up the fund, "there isn't enough to do anything." So it's one-time funding, we won't see any of it happen in our lifetime, and it's clearly a disappointment.

Once again, if you look at the Whitby–Ajax riding, what's being said in that riding, quite clearly—Christine Elliott wants to send you a message. Roger Anderson was quoted in the article I cited earlier from the Toronto Star. It says, "Durham Wonders Why it Was Excluded." In fact, you'd have to say that Durham region was left wondering; that's what Roger Anderson said. In fact, Richard Gauder, president of the Whitby Chamber of Commerce, said, "Durham region is one of the fastest-growing regions within the GTA," but there was no mention of any issues to be dealt with in this area.

I'm disappointed by the actions, not just by the minister's commitments here today but by the evidence in the budget. If you can actually believe anything the Liberals say, it'll be a new day.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark–Carleton): I'd like to respond to the minister's statement with regard to the setting up of a committee on electoral reform.

I am continually amazed by this government's arrogance with regard to this issue. There was not a call from

the minister with regard to whom they were going to pick to head up this particular committee. I have no trouble with the Honourable George Thomson; he's a very able representative. But I would have thought that when we're going forward with reform in this Legislature, all parties would be involved in some aspects of reform.

We have objections to the question that's being asked of the citizens' committee. We do not have objection to having a citizens' committee, but we think that a very narrow question as to how MPPs are elected here will not solve our democratic deficit. We believe much more strongly that reform is necessary in our institution of Parliament, and that the confidence of the public will only be gained if elected officials start to behave in a more appropriate fashion when they in fact get elected to this place. In this current climate of public distrust, something this McGuinty government has only aggravated by breaking election promise after election promise, this will not solve the problem.

FINANCEMENT DU PROGRAMME DES INFRASTRUCTURES

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

M. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–Baie James): Le gouvernement annonce justement dans le budget de cette année un programme de transports appelé Transports-Action Ontario. Quelle action? Un programme qui va donner seulement une année d'argent dont on a vraiment besoin pour les transports en commun dans toutes les municipalités de la province.

Écoute. Ce dont les municipalités ont besoin, c'est de l'argent qui va continuer année après année, pour s'assurer que non seulement la ville de Mississauga ou de Toronto a de l'argent pour l'infrastructure des transports en commun, mais d'autres communautés hors de la ville de Toronto telles que Timmins, Thunder Bay et autres.

C'est une des critiques qu'on a, que le programme est seulement d'une année, et deuxièmement, qu'il vise vraiment le sud de la province, où la majorité de l'argent va être dépensée.

The other thing that is really ironical about this particular announcement is that not only does it fall on the heels, but just afterwards, there's going to be a fare increase for riders of the Toronto transit system. Imagine those people who take the TTC every day, especially the people from Toronto–Danforth, who are going to be in a by-election on Thursday: If they were voting on Sunday, they'd be mad as heck. Why? TTC rates are going up.

This government is doing nothing to deal with the ongoing costs that are associated with running a subway or bus system in the city of Toronto. There used to be a time when those programs were cost-shared between the province and the municipal government and fares were much lower. What we have now is a government that's saying, "We'll give you money for only one year, and you guys can go and do what you want outside of a by-election."

This is nothing more than an election ploy. Don't buy Dalton McGuinty's line. He has lied to you before. He will do so again.

Sorry; I take that back. I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Member for Beaches–East York.

1420

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): First, to the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal: We would gladly welcome the development down on the Don lands. We think that any time there is development on brown-field sites anywhere in this province, it is a good thing, and we support the development of a new waterfront park that all Torontonians and all Ontarians can enjoy. But I would like to quote what the Acting Premier said three years ago, because I think the same thing is true today: "He's been sitting on this money. He's been waiting for a politically opportune time to announce it. While he has done that, people across this province have suffered. That's the kind of cynicism you get from that government and that's why they need to go"—George Smitherman in this Legislative Assembly, December 12, 2002.

The same thing is absolutely true here. The people in Toronto, particularly in the east end of Toronto, are suffering because this government is forging ahead in the port lands. They are going ahead with a project that the community does not want, that the mayor does not want, that the council does not want, that the waterfront czar has spoken to the Premier about, saying that he does not want it. As a matter of fact, there isn't a single, solitary institution or individual or professional in this city that has come out in favour of what you're doing.

Now you're trying to cloud the whole issue by saying, "Here is a waterfront park. We're going to put in some things. We're going to make it beautiful." How can you do that with a mega gas-fired plant across the waterway from them? How can you do that with the pollution that is going to be caused? How can you do this when your own medical officer of health has told you that this is going to increase pollution in Toronto enormously? I fail to understand it. I believe it's cynical, and I believe it has nothing to do with anything except with the by-election that is taking place on Thursday.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): To the minister of democratic renewal, I would gladly be persuaded, and I think the citizens who are going to come forward would gladly be persuaded, but you have an obligation first to tell them, when they go through all of those months and those agonies of the days of trying to find a better system, if there is, in fact, a better system—and then it's going to go to a referendum. But you will not tell, and you have not to date told, the people of the province or the people who are about to be chosen the percentage that is going to have to take place in the referendum.

We saw what happened in British Columbia. Those people worked for over a year to have their recom-

mendation put before the people of British Columbia, only to have it completely go for nothing because the level was set artificially high. It was set at 60% plus two thirds of the ridings. You have to state that in advance.

I was not at the press conference this morning, but I was told that was requested of you and you were asked, and it was not there. The people cannot be expected to put in all of that work for something that is impossible.

The committee—boldly, I think—said that it should be 50% plus one, and we expect that from you. We also expect that the list should be updated in advance so that new Canadians and younger people who were not on the list 11 years ago, when it was last updated, have an opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

VISITORS

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like you to join me in welcoming the members of the Human Rights Advisory Council from Morocco: Dr. Mohamed Berdouzi, Dr. Badiaa Mellouk and Dr. Salah El Ouadie, accompanied by the head of the Moroccan community in Toronto.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you, and welcome. That, of course, is not a point of order.

ORAL QUESTIONS

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Could you please tell us how much money will be spent on the York subway expansion in the 2005-06 fiscal year? That's this year. How much money will be spent on that project in this year?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The entire amount we spoke about is being set into trust. It has had the full scrutiny of the Provincial Auditor. Though he can't do an opinion on it yet, he's been part of the loop all the way along. So the entire amount is now set aside and committed to public transit for the greater Toronto area.

I should say that is an appropriate investment, one that we're proud of. We're proud to partner with Toronto, we're proud to partner with York region, and we look forward. The ball is now in their court to make sure that this happens as quickly as possible. Their provincial government is in support of them, and we're going to work with them to ensure the best possible public transit in the greater Toronto area.

Mr. Tory: First of all, the truth of the matter is that the auditor doesn't have any details of your trust at all yet. The other truth of the matter is that the government will actually be spending very little money this year on

the project itself. It won't crack ground, as you know, for several years to come.

You and your spendaholic government are so intent on creating a deficit this year, you're so opposed to balancing the budget, you are so addicted to buying votes that you are going to be booking money that is not even going to be spent. You should have made the commitment to support the transit project, paid for it as it was actually built, and used the windfall that you have to balance the budget this year, right now.

My question is this: Can you tell us what the annual net interest charges will be to fund the money that you are putting into this trust fund, while it sits there and the subway is not yet being built? What is the annual interest charge on that?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The annual interest charge will be a lot less than the charges associated with them cutting taxes while the budget was in deficit; a lot less than that.

Let me tell you about another deficit; it's the infrastructure deficit. We're proud of our investment: \$1.4 billion in Move Ontario. What I am most proud of is that we are eliminating that deficit. We're confident that the economic benefit to the greater Toronto region and the economic benefit to the entire province of Ontario will be so great, over time, that that economic deficit that economists have talked about—you yourself said, "I don't give a hoot who paid for the subway as long as we get it built," Toronto Sun, November 6, 2004.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to have it both ways. The Leader of the Opposition says, "Balance the budget. Give more money to the farmers." The Leader of the Opposition wants to cut taxes—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Stop the clock.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I need order. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: I hope the Minister of Finance is equally proud of the fact that the bogus accounting, and his desperate desire to make sure that we don't have a balanced budget this year and that we do have a deficit, will cost the taxpayers \$50 million; \$50 million so that you can play political games. That's enough money to provide a lot more help for farmers or to hire 480 nurses. That's \$50 million so that you can set up this gimmick trust and pretend you're spending the money now, when you're not. There are no shovels going into the ground. There is no money being spent. It is irresponsible, and it is playing politics.

I ask you to stand in your place now and say, "Yes, we will build the subway, but we will expense the money when it is needed and we will not put the taxpayers through an expenditure of \$50 million a year of their hard-earned money," to support your political gimmicks.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: For the leader of a party that said it had a balanced budget and left a \$5.5-billion deficit, it takes a lot of chutzpah to talk that way.

Let me tell you, we're proud of that investment, and we're proud of the trust we've set up. What we need now

is for the federal government to come to the table with their share. Do you know what? If the federal government comes to the table with their share, that construction can start right away. That's all we're waiting for.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, I met with Mr. Flaherty. I've spoken to Mr. Flaherty. The Premier has spoken to Mr. Flaherty. We are glad that you've offered to make the phone call. The sooner that call happens, the sooner the federal government money flows, the sooner it will be built.

I hope they're at the table in their budget. I hope construction gets going. In the interim, we've set aside that money for public transit to improve the economic efficiency and economy not only of the GTA—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

Mr. Tory: My question is also to the Minister of Finance. I could ask you, why, when you had a multi-billion dollar revenue windfall, you didn't balance the budget or even come as close as you can, but it's actually worse than that, and it's really an offshoot of the same thing we were just discussing.

Why did you, exactly as the budget leak speculated, do everything you could not to balance the budget and in fact create a deficit which will have the result of costing the taxpayers of Ontario tens and tens and tens of millions of dollars in additional debt charges? Why did you try as hard as you could not to balance the budget? Why did you do that?

1430

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The Leader of the Opposition wants to have it both ways. He says to balance the budget. So I say to the Leader of the Opposition, what would you not have done? Would you not have given \$125 million to the grain and oilseed farmers? Would you not have provided \$114 million to keep Stelco active? Would you not have provided support for the forestry sector industry? Why wouldn't you support applying that money to public transit in the greater Toronto area?

The Minister of Health just reminds me of the cost of gridlock to this great metropolis and to the surrounding areas: more than \$2 billion per year. We made a strategic and prudent choice to invest in public transit.

We have eliminated 75% of the \$5.5-billion deficit that that leader and his party left this province. We're proud of those investments and they're right for the people—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The creation of this phony deficit and the creation of this gimmicky trust fund is not going to get one train on the tracks any sooner and it is not going to get one car moving any faster. It is simply going to cost the taxpayers of Ontario \$50 million of their hard-earned money per year to finance your political chicanery.

Another thing you could have done to balance the budget is to look for more savings and efficiencies. Last year your predecessor said he had so far found \$407 million out of a total target of \$750 million—a weak-

kneed target of \$750 million—in savings over the term of the government.

This year, in your budget address, I say to the Minister of Finance, the number still stands at \$407 million, meaning that in a whole year you didn't find one additional cent of waste and inefficiency. In your mad dash to shovel money out the door, have you given up on finding any efficiencies or eliminating any waste in your fat, bloated government?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The only thing that's fat and bloated is the rhetoric of the Leader of the Opposition. We have achieved \$407 million in efficiencies in two and a half years. That's on top of a budget that had a \$5.5-billion deficit, in spite of the fact that they said it was balanced. So unlike the Leader of the Opposition, we're investing in public transit and we're proud of it: \$400 million to roads and bridges, to municipalities throughout the province, and the money started flowing this week.

Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, we've provided \$800 million to our farmers to provide assistance to the family farm. He says we shouldn't have done that. We're proud we did it and we wish we could have done more.

This budget has eliminated 75% of the deficit we inherited. It invests in public transit. It invests in health care and education. We're undoing the deficits that he and his party left saddled to the province of Ontario just two and a half short years ago.

Mr. Tory: The minister obviously has nothing to say on the subject of trying to find efficiencies and find waste in the government, and therefore I think your answer also confirms that in one year, from last year to this year, you found not one cent in additional savings, in additional efficiencies in the government.

Interjections.

Mr. Tory: Well, then, explain why it's at \$407 million two years in a row.

And I would ask you, are you prepared to table the list of the \$407 million? It's not \$408 million, it's not \$406 million, it's \$407 million. Table the list of the \$407 million in the House and tell us what you found this past year, because the number is exactly the same. It's pathetic that you couldn't find one dollar in additional waste in this government. Will you table the \$407-million list in this House today? Will you table it?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: What we're proud of is investing in public transit. What we're proud of is eliminating the health care deficit that we found when we came here. What we're proud of is 4,300 new teachers in schools across the province; 600 special education teachers teaching gym and art and music. Imagine that: gym and art and music back in our schools, with \$1 million for new textbooks.

We're slowly but surely removing the health deficit, the education deficit, the infrastructure and indeed the financial deficit that was left by Mr. Tory and his party. In two and a half short years, the achievements we have made are just the beginning. This government remains committed to public health care, public education, better infrastructure, and prudent and responsible fiscal man-

agement, something that was absent when your party was in office for eight long, painful years.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Can you tell the people of Ontario why the McGuinty government is still clawing back the national child benefit supplement from the poorest children in Ontario?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'm happy to take this question. I will perhaps refer any supplementaries to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

Let me tell you how disappointed I am that after calling for the support of the leader of the NDP and his caucus in securing the \$1.9-billion agreement for early learning and child care that our government struck with the government of Canada on behalf of families in Ontario—including families of lower income who need the support that we want to provide to them, in terms of high-quality child care spaces and income subsidies, so that they can have the opportunity to go out, study, go out, work, improve their opportunities to be able to support their families better. I know there are some members of the Tory—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Interjection.

The Speaker: Be seated, Minister. Supplementary.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, this is the McGuinty government's election platform: Before the election, you said it was wrong to take money from the poorest children in Ontario. In fact, I can quote the Premier. He said, "The clawback is wrong and we will end it." Four hundred and forty-three thousand children live in poverty in Ontario—one in six children—under the McGuinty government. We see that last year your government had a \$3-billion revenue windfall. You could easily have afforded the \$220 million to end the clawback, to stop taking money away from the poorest kids in Ontario. Can you tell those children and their parents why, when the McGuinty government had a \$3-billion revenue surplus windfall, you continue to take \$1,500 a year away from the poorest kids in Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The doublespeak on behalf of the leader of the provincial NDP is really quite disappointing. If he really cared about children in Ontario, he would be supporting our request that the government of Canada honour the \$1.9-billion agreement which would have served to benefit the same children that he claims to be supporting. That's \$1.4 billion that he wants us to leave on the table rather than standing by even his federal colleagues, who are on the same page that we are on, supporting children and families in Ontario.

Mr. Hampton: Minister, maybe you need a briefing from your officials, because it is the federal government

that established the national child care benefit. It is the federal government which sends \$1,500 a year to very poor children and their families, and over \$2,000 a year where there are two children in the family. But it's the McGuinty government that takes that money away from those children. It's got nothing to do with the federal government giving this money and taking it back; they've given it. It's the McGuinty government that's taking it back from the poorest kids, despite the specific promise of Dalton McGuinty that he was going to end it because it was "wrong." You had a \$3-billion revenue surplus last year—a \$3-billion revenue windfall. You could easily have afforded it. Tell those poor kids and those families why, under those circumstances, you continue to take \$1,500 away from those poorest children in Ontario every year.

1440

The Speaker: The question has been asked. Minister?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: We know that families in Ontario are a lot better off than when we took over this government in 2003. I know that my colleague the Minister of Community and Social Services is really eager to add to this debate.

Interjection.

The Speaker: No, you—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: All right, Mr. Speaker, let me tell the leader of the NDP. A single parent with two children in this province is now more than \$1,600 per year better off than they were when we were elected to lead this government in 2003—a 15.6% increase over 2003-04. Now, is there more to be done? Yes, there is more to be done, and we look forward to doing more for these families, as we have been doing in the first two and a half years of our government.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): To the Minister of Children and Youth Services, you may say you're putting in \$1,600. What they see is that you're taking \$1,500 a year out of their pockets—families that can barely afford to pay the rent and put food on the table.

But I want to ask you about your budget cut to child care. Your own budget document shows that in this coming fiscal year, 2006-07, you're going to cut \$186 million from child care. There has been \$3 billion in surplus revenue this past year, but in the coming year you're going to take \$186 million out of child care—a 22% cut.

Tell me, with so many families waiting for child care, with those surplus revenues you had last year, and even larger surplus revenues headed into this year, how do you justify cutting \$186 million from child care?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): The leader of the NDP again continues to mislead people. You know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): You need to reword—

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: I withdraw that. I'd like to suggest that what the leader of the NDP has just said is grossly inaccurate.

Of the first three years of the five-year agreement, our target was to extend the capacity of child care facilities in this province by 25,000 new spaces, new spaces that clearly reflect the demand for this kind of facility. As indicated by the progress we have made to date, by September 2006, more than 14,000—in fact, 14,783—new spaces will have been provided. I look forward to responding to supplementary questions.

Mr. Hampton: What I think people have a hard time swallowing is that, once again, this is the Dalton McGuinty election document, where you promised you were going to put in \$300 million a year of new provincial funding for child care. Now, what we see is that you had \$3 billion of surplus revenues last year, you're going to have even more revenues in the fiscal year that we're going into, and yet the McGuinty government isn't going to put in \$300 million of new provincial funding for child care; you're actually going to chop \$186 million of money that was already there. Tell me, when you make these promises in your election document, when you clearly had surplus revenues coming in last year and even more coming in this next fiscal year, how do you justify cutting \$186 million from child care?

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: Again, the leader of the NDP is not being accurate in his statements. Let me give you a sense of what we're doing.

We are ensuring that the additional capacity in the child care system here in Ontario will be sustained, that we will be able to support the 14,783 spaces that will be added by September 2006, while we continue to fight on behalf of families in Ontario who have said they need this kind of support. We are very pleased that our government was able to secure a five-year agreement with the government of Canada. If the leader of the NDP really cared about families and children in Ontario, he would be standing beside us, just as his federal colleagues are standing beside us, in support of the federal government honouring that agreement.

Mr. Hampton: I support my federal leader, Jack Layton, in the fight for a national child care strategy, but this is about your budget. This is about your election promise, where you said that you were going to put \$300 million of new provincial money into child care. Yet here we see that in fact there's no \$300 million of new provincial funding—not last year, not this year. With surplus revenues last year, you didn't put \$300 million into child care. With even bigger revenues going ahead in the next fiscal year, which begins on April 1, you're not putting \$300 million into child care; you're cutting \$186 million, 22% of the child care budget. I simply think that all those hard-working parents who are waiting in line for child care deserve an explanation from the McGuinty government. Why are you cutting child care by \$186 million—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Mrs. Chambers: The Minister of Finance would actually like to address this.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I would refer members to page 95 of the document. This looks at the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. I will point out to the member opposite that since this government took office, not only have we exceeded \$300 million, we're over \$900 million. Now, I could be disingenuous like the leader of the third party—that has a lot more to do with things other than child care—but I'm not going to be disingenuous like that. That's not the right way to have this debate. It's true; the amount of money available for child care has gone down because we lost \$1.4 billion from the federal government.

I was just reminded that they scrapped 6,000 daycare subsidies when they were in office. Here's what Kerry McCuaig had to say. "The NDP government killed provincial child care."

This budget saves provincial child care. It invests the money that we have to keep 14,000 of 25,000 spaces—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): My question is for the Minister of Finance, and the Acting Premier. At an \$800-a-ticket Liberal fundraiser in early March, the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Sorbara, reportedly tipped off at least one guest to the fact that you'd be announcing the York subway expansion in last Thursday's budget. Of course, we all know that tip was absolutely correct. You know the financial implications of this kind of leak, and it's your responsibility to ensure the integrity of the budget process. So I ask you again, can you confirm for this House that you've referred this important matter to the OPP for investigation?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): We are proud of the Move Ontario plan that we tabled in this House last Thursday. We're proud to be responding to the first priority of the Toronto Transit Commission; we're proud to respond to York region's first priority. We're proud that a subway expansion that was fully documented and an environmental assessment are moving ahead. We're proud to say that we're going further than that: We're going to the Vaughan Corporate Centre, and we're very proud of that. We're also proud of the fact that this government keeps its commitments on public transit and invests properly.

The budget process is out in public. The speculation that was there before was all a matter of public record prior to the budget. This investment's going forward; that subway is going to be built. They can try all they want to stop it, but we're moving forward. It's the right thing to do.

1450

Mr. Wilson: I would just say to the minister and to everyone here that there seems to be a pattern developing around swanky Liberal fundraisers, the former Minister of Finance and land north of Toronto. Last year, it was a

multi-million dollar exemption from the greenbelt that was handed out following a \$10,000-a-plate fundraiser at the Sorbara mansion. Now, at an \$800-a-plate Liberal fundraiser with Mr. Sorbara, highly sensitive and potentially lucrative information about the budget is leaked weeks in advance.

In Ottawa, the federal Liberal Party is under investigation by the RCMP for potentially leaking lucrative financial information a few days in advance of an announcement. The subway leak took place weeks in advance, giving those who may have known about it ample time to take advantage of it. So I ask you again, why haven't you done the right thing and called in the OPP to investigate this matter?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Journalists will do a good job to try to get public information as quickly as they can, and there's always speculation on budgets. In fact, let's have a look. The 2003 Magna budget: We all remember that budget, don't we? I remember that. That was out at Magna. We decided not to do ours there, even though Belinda is with us now. But let me tell you, it was a budget full of tax cuts, and that was published weeks before the budget. Did you call an OPP investigation? No.

Headline: "Tax Cuts to be Jewel of Ontario's Non-budget," *Globe and Mail*, March 27, 2003. Did you have an OPP investigation? No.

Headline: "Putting Eves's Defence to a Reality Check," *Toronto Star*, March 26, 2003. Did you put that to an OPP security check? No.

By the way, just so we don't forget, it happened in 2002, 2000, 1999—oh, and in 1991 in the NDP budget: "Corporate Tax Plan on Hold, Official Hints." Was there an OPP investigation? No. That was a tax leak. In the 1992 budget, headline, *Globe and Mail*, April 23: "Ontario"—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Acting Premier. Perhaps we can get a better answer than we just got from the Minister of Finance.

On March 8, Vaughan Mayor Michael Di Biase told reporters that, weeks before the budget was unveiled, former Finance Minister Greg Sorbara informed him that a subway expansion into Vaughan would be included. Days later, Mr. Sorbara, a member of your caucus, denied that the conversation ever took place and insisted he knew nothing about the budget at all. My question to you, Mr. Acting Premier: How do you explain the discrepancy?

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm very proud as a Torontonians who has been around the subject of an expansion of that subway line north to York University and beyond for at least two decades. In fact, I had the privilege of serving, in a prior life in politics, as chief of staff to Barbara Hall, the mayor of Toronto, who at the time was a member of Metro council before the amalgamation of the city of Toronto. At the time, the NDP government was in office. I believe that the proposal in discussion at that time was

for a five-fold expansion of subway lines in the city of Toronto. Most certainly at that time, the conversation with respect to the expansion to York University and York region beyond was front and centre. My colleague was the chair of the Toronto Transit Commission during the same time period. This discussion was ongoing then. Accordingly, I think it's just about time that the honourable member in the back row over there figured out what most of us had figured out a good decade or two ago.

Mr. Prue: Perhaps the Acting Premier has forgotten that I was a mayor then too, and I was part of the same discussions with his boss. But my question is about the discrepancy. I'm going to say it again: My question is about the discrepancy. The former finance minister says he knew nothing about the budget items, but the mayor of Vaughan has clearly stated that Mr. Sorbara did know the details and shared them with him. Then on budget day, the *Globe and Mail* reports that Mr. Sorbara's family stands to pocket a substantial amount of change once the budget goes through.

It doesn't look good for this Legislature; it doesn't look good for your government; it doesn't look good for the process of the budget. Mr. Acting Premier, are you going to take any steps to clear the air, investigate the matter and reassure the public that everything here has been done properly?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: I would strenuously assert that what doesn't look good is that the honourable member, part of a party that used to have a commitment to public transit, instead has demonstrated very little more than a commitment to mudslinging. To draw into the conversation land holdings that people may or may not have had over a period of decades is, I think, the best example yet that there are some of those out there who want to manufacture circumstances that are really quite unconnected.

The reality is very, very clear. Anyone connected to the reality of the greater Toronto area, of its growth and of the challenges associated with moving people in it, knows well that the issue at hand is not a matter of just the last week or two weeks, but rather a matter that has challenged our region for a couple of decades. Accordingly, I'm—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Canada's farmers are in a dire position. Environmental concerns and economic factors have left them in a tough spot. I was very pleased to see our government's show of support in the form of the \$125-million package targeting the hardest-hit sectors. Ontario is the only province in this country to show that kind of support to its farmers. I know our government has held the position that a multi-year risk management program, in partnership with the federal government, is the direction that needs to be taken. This government continues to do what it can, but it

simply cannot compete with countries like our southern neighbour. The federal government has to come to the table. Minister, you have been tireless in pressing this point to your federal counterparts. Can you tell us if you have received any commitment from the federal government yet?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I appreciate the strong advocacy of the member from Huron-Bruce for the agriculture community. She raises a very important point. Our government has been meeting with farm groups, certainly since we've come to government, and I have since I've come to this portfolio. Last fall, we had a plan that we wanted to bring to the federal government. We've been listening to farmers and they say that they want a multi-year strategy. They want to stop the one-offs that governments have provided to them up until now. They want a multi-year strategy that includes the provincial government and the federal government.

I've had the opportunity to bring this to the attention of the federal minister. There is a commitment out there, a campaign commitment from the federal government, that they are prepared to spend \$500 million. I have not had any resounding response that they are ready to do this. I called the federal minister just this morning to again press to meet with him because this is—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. There may be a supplementary. Supplementary?

Mrs. Mitchell: I would encourage all members here, and especially the members over there, to press their federal counterparts to live up to their obligation to our farmers. While many of the factors that affect farmers are addressed on the federal level, we can and we must continue to do all we can for our farmers and our rural way of life in Ontario. The tradition is integral to the identity of this province and of this country. The recent budget addressed this need. Can you tell us this government's commitment to our farmers? It shall continue, Minister.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I believe that the budget document in many ways demonstrates our government's commitment to farmers and to rural Ontario. Again, the budget of agriculture, food and rural affairs has increased. But I think what's most important in this document is that it is clearly stated that our government is committed to a multi-year strategy with the federal government. It's time they came to the table with the money. Our Premier has made it very clear that we are at the table. We are ready, with our sleeves rolled up, to work toward a plan that will stop the one-offs and will bring the sustainability to this industry that it's been asking for and that it deserves.

It's time folks on that side of the House pick up the phone, call their federal members and tell Mr. Harper this has to be a priority. Agriculture needs to be added to the five priorities at the federal level. We need action now for farmers in Ontario.

The Speaker: New question. The Leader of the Opposition.

1500

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is for the Minister of Finance, following up on both that very interesting self-congratulatory question and also the minister's answer, where she indicates—I think in fact what we have, and I asked the Minister of Finance about this, is 244 million ways in which this government has demonstrated its lack of commitment to the farmers of Ontario, and that's the cutback of \$244 million you've got in your budget for the farmers of Ontario. So I want to know, in the midst of all this largesse, that you can afford to be putting hundreds of millions of dollars in phony trust funds for stuff that isn't even needed this year in terms of the actual spending—the spending is not needed. The spending will not happen this year—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Stop the clock. Order. I'm having difficulty hearing the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Tory: The spending is not needed this year. On top of that, we've established that it's going to cost \$50 million in interest charges for you to set up this phony trust fund for money that won't be spent this year, won't be spent next year, does not need to be booked now. So my question is this: When you had this mountain of additional revenue, why did you choose to put money into the phony trust fund and cost taxpayers millions in interest and leave the farmers faced with a \$244-million spending cutback on the part of your government?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I would refer the Leader of the Opposition to page 95 of the budget. For this year, which we are still in, 2005-06, the leader of the opposition will be aware that three weeks ago we announced \$125 million. That is included in this year's line.

Next year we're going to be looking at all these issues, as we have every year. We've put \$800 million into our farm communities through income supports in three years. But let me point out one other number to the leader of the third party. That's the last full year you were in office, when you spent less than \$650 million on agriculture. We're up to over a billion dollars this year, including \$800 million for income support.

When there's a problem on the family farm, we all have a problem. We're standing behind our farmers, and I say to the Leader of the Opposition, please help us with the federal government—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Tory: The Minister of Finance is so much wanting to refer to page 95, and in fact, it does show, for 2005-06, total spending of \$1.14 billion. Here it is right here—tell me which part of the math is wrong: total spending for 2006-07 at \$896 million, a reduction of \$244 million to the farmers of Ontario.

We phoned the Agricorp toll-free number today. They said that, out of all this money that you've committed in the current fiscal year, not one red cent of the new money recently announced has flowed. You play this blame

game, you and your colleague, with the federal government. Their money is actually flowing to farmers today. The money that's not flowing is only because you haven't supplied them with the crop data they need to know which farmers should get so much. So why are you dragging your feet, why are you cutting back \$244 million, why are you delaying sending them the crop data, and why aren't you getting any cheques out the door, as your own toll-free hotline confirmed this afternoon? It's because you've turned your backs on the farmers in Ontario. It's a disgrace.

The Speaker: The question's been asked.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Year over year, expenditures have gone up both on the operating basis and on the contingency basis.

Interestingly enough, when our farming community was having problems in 1997-98, was there any one-time extraordinary money? No. In 1998-99: No. In 2000-01, there was a bit; still not even close to what we've put in. In 2001-02, nothing. In 2002-03, nothing. And by the way, that \$125 million we've booked this year, which we gave three weeks ago—you said we shouldn't have done it. You said we should have balanced the budget. You're trying to have it every which way. You tell the farmers one thing; you tell the financial community another thing.

This government stands behind its farming community. When there's a problem on the family farm, we all have a problem. Now it's time for the federal government to come to the table—

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): On a point of order, Mr Speaker: I heard the Minister of Labour utter a completely unparliamentary remark, and I would ask you to ask him to withdraw it.

The Speaker: I didn't hear it, but if he did, he has the opportunity to withdraw.

New question.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Inquests across the province have repeatedly asked your government to restore counselling services, tighten restraining orders and, in the case of the Gillian Hadley inquest, change bail provisions. Yet you've failed to act. Two weeks ago, Fallon Mason, a 23-year-old Brantford woman, was reportedly murdered by an ex-boyfriend. Brantford police believe that her death could have been prevented. Minister, how many more women must die before your government takes the necessary measures to fight and prevent violence against women?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): The member opposite will know how proud this government is of the domestic violence action plan that we tabled in this House months and months ago. Encompassed in that plan are four significant areas for change and improvement. The member opposite should also tell

us which of those she disagrees with, because they are significant.

In the first area, training, for the first time we are funding training of front-line people, professionals involved in domestic violence. For the first time ever, the Ontario government is involved. In a significant area, for the first time, the Ontario government is involved in public education to actually change attitudes around the area of domestic violence. A significant part of our plan is enhancements to community supports, and this member opposite should appreciate that with the number in her own riding that have benefited. Fourth, and very important, is the justice sector and the significant amount of work that is being done to improve the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

Ms. Horwath: The minister must know that she promised \$68 million for your domestic violence action plan, yet only \$26 million has actually flowed, most of it in pilot projects. According to the Ontario Women's Justice Network, your program direction itself is vague, despite the detailed recommendations you have had from coroners, from inquests, from stakeholders and even from your own advisers. Minister, you're nowhere near keeping even half of your promises to women. In your budget you had the chance to truly protect women. Why didn't you?

Hon. Ms. Papatello: Let me say this: The information that this member opposite is suggesting is absolute nonsense. Let me tell you that our plan is a \$68-million commitment over these four years of implementation, and a significant amount has gone out the door already. She should know this, because she was busy calling my office for the details all last week. And we gave them all of the information that they needed to present accurate information in this House.

Let me talk about these incidents in Brantford over these last couple of weeks, because this is a tragedy that Ontarians face on a regular basis. We need this to stop. We need this to change. Last week, I met once again with the new federal minister responsible so that we could discuss issues like the changes to the Criminal Code, which is a federal responsibility and which may be the only place where we actually have common ground with this new national government, and that is the discussion of reverse onus on bail. It is a significant issue that I would appreciate help—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

1510

TORONTO WATERFRONT

Ms. Kathleen O. Wynne (Don Valley West): My question today is for the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal. Earlier today, Minister Caplan made an announcement regarding a groundbreaking for a new community to be built in the west Don lands on the Toronto waterfront. This news was a long time coming, for many reasons, but largely because previous provincial governments dragged their heels and did not act. Toronto resi-

dents really want a waterfront that's vital and thriving. Could you explain, Minister, how this plan came to fruition, and what role this provincial government had in making it happen?

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): It is a delight to be able to answer this question because it was my great honour this morning to, at long last, set in motion real, tangible action to deliver on a vision of a waterfront revitalized here in the city of Toronto. After decades of unfulfilled expectations, today marks a historic turning point. Waterfront renewal has truly moved from planning to implementation, with the beginning of the first major sustainable community. The reason for that? What made the difference? In a word, leadership: the leadership exemplified by Premier McGuinty and our government when we signed in September 2005 an MOU with the waterfront corporation and our own Ontario Realty Corp. We led the way to unlock the jurisdictional gridlock that has held up waterfront renewal for generations.

I want to acknowledge the determined support of our colleague the Honourable George Smitherman for his stewardship in the initiative of Toronto Centre-Rosedale and the many residents and advisory groups who have never given up on their mission of building a better community. I also want to recognize the city of Toronto and—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Ms. Wynne: I think it's important that we do recognize the federal government and the city of Toronto in moving this plan forward. I'm sure that every member from Toronto in this House and in fact every member will support the ideal of a strong and vital waterfront in Toronto because if Toronto's waterfront is to be an integral part of the city, if it's to draw residents and tourists and business to the city, we must do what you've begun today. We know that this is vital to the city, Minister, but could you outline why this is so important to the whole province of Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Caplan: It's important as a showcase for the many priorities of the McGuinty government. The west Don lands will be an exemplar of how modern communities should grow. As we outlined in our proposed growth strategy for the greater Golden Horseshoe, the west Don lands will be shaped by the broader principles of brownfield redevelopment, affordable housing, environmentally sustainable and transit-oriented development, and open park space. The west Don lands will include 6,000 new residential units—1,500 affordable units—for over 10,000 new residents; 25% of the community will be parks and open space, including an eight-hectare Don River Park; a new light rail transit line within a five-minute walk of all of the new homes; two child care centres; a community centre and pool; and a new elementary school. The west Don lands initiative is Ontario's highest Toronto waterfront revitalization priority, and I am proud to stand before you today and tell you that it has become a reality.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Essentially your budget ignores one of the fastest-growing regions not just in Canada but certainly here in Ontario in the areas of transportation, agriculture and health care. For example, you extended funding for the York region subway at \$670 million; \$95 million to the city of Brampton for transit; \$65 million for Mississauga. Conspicuously absent from the eastern GTA is the Durham region. I quote Roger Anderson, who is the chair, and he says he's left wondering why they're excluded: "Durham ... is one of the fastest-growing regions within the GTA and yet there was no mention at all for transportation."

Minister, I'm quite familiar with the issues myself as I talk to my constituents each day and I listen to the people. I've read the Toronto Star article on this. Why have you ignored Durham region in your most recent budget?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I had the chance to talk to Judi Longfield about this just last night. Let me tell you what I told Judi Longfield. We have redeveloped the Ajax and Pickering hospital to increase emergency room capacity by 60,000 visits and expand lab and mental health services—something you didn't do in eight long, painful years. We invested \$5 million in 2006 to support public transit in Durham. What did you do for public transit? You cut all money out of public transit. One hundred and ninety new teachers hired at local public and Catholic high schools; 190 new teachers to teach kids in Durham region. Some \$93 million invested in 18 Whitby-Ajax long-term-care homes; \$4 million to support violence against women agencies in Durham region; \$18.8 million for Durham affordable, high-quality child care spaces. That's an enviable record—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. O'Toole: Minister, what I'm actually hearing is that you're paying more and getting less. It could be no more evident than just driving around Durham region. In fact, the chair once again said a lot of money is going to the west of Yonge Street, very little east of Yonge Street.

In fact, in the agricultural sector, Ron Bonnett, the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said, "The province keeps talking about the need to have a vibrant economy, but does not reflect this with action" in agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture, as has been stated by our leader, John Tory, was slashed by \$244 million.

You mentioned health care. You know, if I listen and look at health care, what's actually the evidence there is that cancer surgery waiting lists are up 67%, angioplasty is up 213%, hip replacements are up 59%, and the list goes on.

The main issue for me and the people of Ontario is that there's a chance to show this government something

this Thursday, to look at Christine Elliott, to send a message to the Minister of Finance.

Interjection: Who closed Whitby General Hospital?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Yes, who closed Whitby General Hospital? The Tories did. That's who closed Whitby General Hospital.

Let's see:

—\$2.3 million for 140 housing units under the affordable housing program, something you slashed completely;

—50 additional police officers in Durham region and 31 crown prosecutors to fight crime; and

—the greenbelt: 1.8 million acres of protected land in Durham. You were against that.

In the budget, \$22.5 million in road and bridge funding is going to Durham region this week. Why? Because unlike them, we're not suggesting these decisions should be political. What we're saying is that we responded to Toronto's top priority. We responded to York region's top priority. Durham region would be well served by Judi Longfield speaking up in a manner that he knows nothing about in terms of being a strong voice for—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, there are thousands of hard-working farmers across Ontario who are in danger of losing their livelihood and their farms. They have met with your government time and time again to tell you that they have not recovered from the BSE crisis, to tell you that the American subsidies to grains and oilseeds are putting more and more Ontario farmers out of business. They asked you for a risk management strategy. They asked you for some help for farmers who are still struggling with the aftermath of the BSE crisis. Yet, when they looked at your budget, there was nothing. In fact, there was a cut. Can you tell those farmers, farmers like Stephen Webster, who continues to live in his car here at Queen's Park to protest your inaction, why you've turned your back on hard-working Ontario farmers?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I think it is very important that I take this opportunity to set the record straight and remind the people of Ontario that this government has increased the budget at agriculture, food and rural affairs. A cut to agriculture would be what happened under your government, when, over your term, you cut the budget at Ag and Food by over 25%. We increased the budget.

I have been meeting with farm leaders since I've come to this file, and this is what they're asking for: They're asking for a multi-year partnership program with the federal government. Our government did provide them with short-term help to the tune of \$125 million: \$80 million for grains and oilseeds, \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers, and \$10 million that will support the livestock and poultry industry in this province. Our

government has a record of supporting the agriculture industry when—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: It seems the new answer for the McGuinty government on every issue is to now blame the federal government. Minister, if I look to Quebec, Quebec has established a risk management strategy for their grain and oilseed farmers. If I look to Alberta, they have established a risk management strategy for their grain and oilseed farmers. Yet when I look at the Ontario budget: nothing. Not only that, but when I look at communities across rural and northern Ontario, when they look to see what was in the budget to address their needs: nothing. Pickle Lake, for example, told your government that the downloading of policing is literally bankrupting the community. Was there anything to address that? Nothing. The community of Sioux Lookout told you the same thing, that the downloading of Ontario provincial policing was essentially bankrupting the community. Was there anything for them? Nothing.

Tell me again, Minister: When so many communities are in need and when the McGuinty government had \$3 billion in surplus revenue, why did you turn your back on northern and rural Ontario?

1520

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: First of all, I want to correct the honourable member. We're not blaming the federal government; we're looking to the federal government to come to the table and work with us. I know that's a novel concept, but that's exactly what farmers have asked of us and that is exactly what we are committed to do.

In the short term, until we get a multi-year partnership strategy with the federal government, we have invested \$125 million to support farmers. Those cheques will be out within weeks.

That's the kind of support our government has shown for the agriculture community. We have been there, and we will continue to be their advocate with the federal government for the kind of deal they have been asking for.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. My community recently has been rocked by two high-profile tragedies: the death of a small boy and the death of a young woman as a result of domestic violence.

Eight-year-old Jared Osidacz was stabbed to death last Saturday by his father, Andrew. He died while protecting two women who were under attack by his father. They were able to escape because of his heroic sacrifice.

Fallon Mason, a 23-year-old mother of two young children, died a few days earlier in, regrettably, the city's first murder of 2006. She was also a victim of senseless domestic violence at the hands of her ex-boyfriend.

Contrary to what has been said, a review of the protocols in place indicated that no fault should be placed on our local system.

Minister, what actions has our government taken to combat domestic violence across the province?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I think it's apparent to all in this House that every one of us takes these issues extremely seriously and personally because they affect every one of us. To the entire Brantford community, we extend our greatest sympathies in what they are facing today, led of course by our own MPP from Brantford, who himself has been a huge supporter of Nova Vita house in the Brantford area and has often brought that campaign here to the House for full provincial support.

We have worked diligently in this area since we became the government in 2003. We are moving forward with additional changes, enhancements and supports. We need everyone on side to implement our domestic violence action plan, and we intend to do just that.

Mr. Levac: It is clear that all of us here are on the right track. The organizations in my community are grateful for the funding that previous governments and this government have provided, but much more needs to be done.

Many of these organizations and others have said that men need to be better educated about domestic violence. We need to teach our sons that it's not okay to raise your hand to your sister or to your mother. Men need to know that it's not acceptable to strike their partner. Cultures, no matter where, cannot accept the disgrace of hitting their partner. Our daughters must not accept physical or verbal abuse from their boyfriends. A change in culture is needed by men, for men.

Minister, what have we done to support programs and organizations that are working to change the culture of violence?

I every challenge every man in this place to do one more thing to eradicate domestic violence.

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: I think that this member points to the very, very important work that is currently being done on two fronts in this domestic violence action plan. A very significant part is public education, where for the first time we really are leading the charge to bring organizations together and fund them to provide public education opportunities to actually change attitudes. That's what the member from Brantford is speaking about: We need to bring forward programs so that young girls understand that they are equal in gender, and that they grow up to be strong young women and strong women, so that their relationships are, in fact, equal, because every case is about a power struggle in domestic violence, and young women need to know that they will enter into relationships that are, in fact, equal. That's only going to happen when we change attitudes in Ontario.

We're prepared to take the lead. We have said from the beginning that we need everyone on board to be

doing this: friends, families, neighbours, agencies, the provincial government, the federal government, municipalities, all members of this House. We intend to make a difference, even in this first term of our government.

PETITIONS

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I have a petition here on behalf of my colleague Frank Klees to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Interestingly enough, there are many people from my riding who have signed this petition for Mr. Klees.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

“Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver’s licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006.”

I support this petition and so I affix my name to it.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to introduce this petition to the House. I just want to quickly mention the name of Marg Walkden, who in less than two weeks put together over 2,500 signatures on these petitions; 174 pages. So thank you, Marg.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the people of the city of Niagara Falls deserve and have the right to quality health care; and

“Whereas the people petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and”—in particular—“the Niagara Health System to cease the closing of 11 hospital beds scheduled for the Greater Niagara General site; and

“Whereas the people of Niagara Falls feel that further cutbacks at the Greater Niagara General site will have a ... negative impact on the delivery of patient care;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Ministry of Health ... and”—in particular—“the Niagara Health System to cease all cutbacks and provide the citizens of Niagara Falls with ... health care that was once present in the city of Niagara Falls.”

I’m pleased to submit this petition and sign my signature to it.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of people from Oxford county and from ridings around the province. It is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

“Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver’s licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006.”

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

1530

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition addressed to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services.

“Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis....

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one’s good credit rating;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

"(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated ... form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

"(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

"(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit-inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

"(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supplement or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate."

I submit this and I'm glad to sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. John O'Toole (Durham): I have a petition on behalf of Tamara Wilcox and others from the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase ... funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I'm pleased to sign this in support of long-term care in my riding of Durham.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): I'm actually introducing this on behalf of the folks of Etobicoke Centre today. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

SPECIAL CARE HOMES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hundreds of vulnerable adults live in homes for special care that provide them a warm and secure, stable and friendly environment which allows them to lead fulfilling lives; and

"Whereas the alternative for many of these individuals is a life of homelessness on the street; and

"Whereas special care homes have had only a single 3% increase since 1999, which in no way matches the rising costs they face; and

"Whereas the Liberal government promised Ontario in the election they would 'significantly increase supportive housing options for those suffering from mental illness';

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the government to bring in an immediate increase in funding to homes for special care."

I've affixed my signature to this.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I'm happy to bring this petition forward on behalf of Tony and Mario Codispoti from my riding of Mississauga East.

"Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

"Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan, with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

"Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients, with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

"Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Erbitux, Avastin, Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients."

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Bill Murdoch (Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound): I have a petition that Dave and Heather Dunlop of Owen Sound did a lot of work to gather the names for. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or a provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation

while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I have signed this.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly, and I'd like to thank Vijay Kumar, Czarina Tang and Sanjiv Soni for gathering some signatures for me on it. It reads as follows:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West, and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

I'm pleased to support and sign this petition and to have page Leah carry it for me.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Garfield Dunlop (Simcoe North): I have a petition here on macular degeneration. I'd like to thank Dr. Timothy Hillson, from Orillia, who has helped put this together.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas age-related macular degeneration ... is the leading cause of blindness in the elderly and is present in some form in 25% to 33% of seniors over the age of 75. AMD has two forms: the more common 'dry' type and the 'wet' type. Although the wet type occurs in only 15% of AMD patients, these patients account for 90% of the legal blindness that occurs with AMD. The wet type is

further subdivided into classic and occult subtypes, based on the appearance of the AMD on special testing. Photodynamic therapy, a treatment where abnormal blood vessels are closed with a laser-activated chemical, has been shown to slow the progression of vision loss in both subtypes of wet AMD;

"Whereas OHIP has not extended coverage for photodynamic therapy to the occult subtype of wet AMD, despite there being substantial clinical evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of this treatment in patients with either form of wet AMD. Untreated, these patients can expect a progression in their visual loss, with central blindness as the end result;

"Whereas affected patients are in a position where a proven treatment is available to help preserve their vision, but this treatment can only be accessed at their own personal expense. Treatment costs are between \$12,500 and \$18,000 over an 18-month period. Many patients resign themselves to a continued worsening of their vision, as for them the treatment is financially unattainable. The resultant blindness in these patients manifests itself as costs to society in other forms, such as an increased need for home care, missed time from work for family members providing care, and an increased rate of injuries such as hip fractures that can be directly attributable to their poor vision.

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to fund the treatment of the occult sub-type of macular degeneration with photodynamic therapy for all patients awaiting this service."

I'm pleased to sign this, and to pass it on to Mercedes to pass on to you.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls. The petition reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of Ontario demand a quality public education system that will give our children the tools to compete with the world; and

"Whereas Premier McGuinty and the Liberal caucus are fighting for our future by implementing a positive plan to improve our public schools, including smaller class sizes;

"Whereas the Conservative Party and John Tory want to take millions from the public education to literally pay people to withdraw their children from the public system and send them to elite private schools;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support Premier McGuinty in his commitment to giving our children a ladder to success through excellent public education and not spend taxpayer dollars to benefit the few who can afford private school tuitions."

I'm pleased to sign my signature to this petition in support of it.

1540

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It reads, "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994;

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant;

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I support this petition.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2006 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 23, 2006, on the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The leader of the official opposition.

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): I'd like to begin by explaining to the people at home and to the members of the Legislature this tie that I'm wearing today. It's a Montreal Canadiens tie. In view of the very disappointing performance of my Toronto Maple Leafs in the last two outings, Mr. Murdoch has required that I should wear this tie here because he, very honourably, wore a Toronto Maple Leafs tie when, long ago, the Toronto Maple Leafs defeated the Montreal Canadiens. So it's not a happy occasion for me, but I believe very strongly in keeping my word on these matters so I'm wearing the tie today.

I should say I believe very strongly in keeping my word on these and all other matters, as well. I say that for the benefit of my friends opposite.

I think it is—

Interjections.

Mr. Tory: They react so defensively to that.

I think it's important, when you speak, as I'm going to do for the next hour or so about the budget, to start with some good news. There are always some things you can find, if you look hard enough, even in this budget, that are worthy of commendation. I want to start by saying what good news it is that the government of Ontario, under the leadership of the Minister of Finance and the member for Thunder Bay–Superior North, has decided to fund insulin pumps and other such equipment for the people who are suffering from that disease. It's going to make a big difference, especially for a lot of kids, and I commend the government on making a decision which, as the minister indicated at the time of his budget speech, was one that was shared by all members of the House.

I would like to find one more—not just one more, but one more. I also want to say that I support and applaud the decision by the minister and the government to bring in some additional support for the digital interactive business. I've had an opportunity, as I'm sure the minister and other members have, to go to one of the movie production facilities downtown. When you walk in those places, you can hardly believe what you see. There are literally 300 people sitting at computer terminals, doing animation work that creates huge numbers of well-paying jobs for graduates of places like Sheridan and other colleges. It puts us at the forefront of a lot of this movie production which otherwise would not be happening in Ontario, quite frankly.

May I say at the same time that I welcome the decision by the minister to extend the tax credits that apply to other kinds of productions—I'll call them non-digital or more traditional film productions—for another year. I hope that is followed by an extension for another year after that, but I realize you have to watch the marketplace and see what's going on there. I think we've seen, from the time when I was urging the government to do just that a year or so ago, the difference it can make in terms of the number of productions that are here in the province of Ontario, creating jobs and maintaining an industry that is very important to us in many different respects.

That's it for the compliments, I think.

Now let's talk about what this budget is really all about, because what it's really all about in the final analysis is like so much of what this government stands for. It stands for broken promises, in particular by Mr. McGuinty, who went around—it's very clear now—signing just about any letter anybody would put in front of him, promising to do all kinds of things, whether it was help for autistic children who had a written promise that he would help them—nothing delivered so far, three years into the government; nothing in this budget. It's an absolute disgrace that he would sign a letter like that and that there would be nothing in this budget to even acknowledge that he made that promise, a solemn promise, in writing.

Let's move on from there. We have other promises that have been made that have not been kept. We have "pay more, get less." "Pay more, get less" is such a good encapsulation of what this budget is really all about,

because we have people right across the province who are disappointed at the fact they are paying historically high levels of taxes. They are paying the biggest tax increase in history, imposed by the very same Premier who said he would not raise taxes at all, and they're seeing that they are getting less for their money.

In fact, the amount of revenue that is being taken in by this government, by the Liberals, just for comparative purposes, is \$6,600 per capita, for every person in this province. That compares to \$5,700 being taken in under the Progressive Conservative government and \$4,900 under the New Democratic Party government. So we have a situation where they're taking in a record amount, way higher than the two preceding governments, at \$6,600 a person, and yet we are still in deficit and we still have no results.

I think it was summed up very well—I'm going to quote people from all kinds of publications and places, but I'll start with a quote from John Downing, writing in the *Toronto Sun*:

"The McGuinty government's budget last week impressed few people other than desperate Toronto councillors. It was another example of why politicians are once again at the bottom of the credibility ratings for professions and trades.

"Why should we take any budget seriously when all the figures wilt under examination like a field of lettuce in the summer sun? We have just had another example where the Liberals collected more money than they predicted they would, spent less on debt than they estimated, and are hiding the \$3-billion surplus so they can do a better job of bribing us next year when there's an election."

Let's talk about the farmers for a minute. We have, and I'll quote, an article written by Matt Shurrie from the *Woodstock Sentinel-Review*. I'm sure the member for Oxford, who has been fighting so hard for the farmers, will know why he wrote this:

"It was a similar situation for the province's farmers, as they were all but forgotten in the budget. They barely received a mention, unless you count the slap in the face that actually indicated prospects for the sector overall are positive. Perhaps they've missed the four-day protest that gathered steam just outside of the provincial Legislature, or the numerous protests along the province's 400-series of highways. For whatever reason, Duncan simply chose to reannounce the province's commitment over the last three years. 'Shameful' does not go far enough to address how this government has all but ignored the plight of the farmers."

Boy, do they have that one right, because not only did they not do anything; they cut back the funding that's indicated on page 95. The famous page 95 of their own document shows a planned reduction in spending over this year. The numbers speak for themselves: \$1.1-some-odd billion for farmers in the current year that will end this Friday, and next year, \$800-and-some-odd million. Last time I checked, that's minus \$244 million for a sector that is struggling worse than ever.

Pay more, get less: Let's talk about health care. There's an area where everybody knows they're paying more, because they're all paying hundreds of dollars more in the health tax that the McGuinty Liberals imposed, this being the same government of Dalton McGuinty that said they wouldn't raise taxes at all. So they're paying hundreds of dollars more in health tax, and they were told that that money was going to produce a better health system for the people of Ontario.

What do they have? Twice in the last three days I have run into people who told me of the chaos they had experienced in places far apart from each other, in the emergency rooms of Ontario's hospitals, one here in Toronto and one elsewhere. They talked about waiting, in one case for six hours and in the other case for eight hours, to see a doctor. These people are paying hundreds of dollars more in health taxes and they go, as I did, to the Peterborough emergency room. It's absolutely pathetic, what's going on there under your watch, and when people are paying hundreds of dollars more in taxes. They have permanent numbers put up on the wall now beside the fire hydrants, beside the phones and beside the fire hoses to put stretchers so people lying on gurneys can be waiting there because they can't find a bed, because you can't find enough money to give them, notwithstanding that you are collecting billions of dollars from the taxpayers of Ontario through the health tax you said you would not implement. So we've got emergency rooms that are in complete chaos.

1550

We've got wait times. I stood in Durham last week, in Whitby-Ajax, with Christine Elliott. I stood in front of the hospital there and talked about the fact, going from memory, that for an angioplasty the wait times are up 213%; hip replacements, 56% up. These, again, are the good, hard-working people of Durham and Whitby-Ajax who are paying hundreds of dollars more each in your McGuinty health tax and are finding the wait times going up. There are other procedures I could have named where the wait times are going up substantially on your watch. Pay more, get less.

Drugs: I have a clipping right here from the *Globe and Mail*, March 27, 2006—that's today. It's talking about Velcade. You couldn't find any money for that. You're awash in money, you're just drowning in money that's coming in from hard-working taxpayers of Ontario, some of whom actually get sick with cancer and have a drug that elsewhere can be put to use to help them get better. Here's what the *Globe and Mail* had to say about that: "Doctors in Ontario say this refusal to fund Velcade, and the refusal to release Thalomid, has turned the treatment clock back a decade. Even more infuriating, the Drug Quality and Therapeutics Committee, an expert advisory committee to the Ontario government, will not explain why it recommended that Ontario not fund Velcade when other provinces came to the opposite conclusion."

There would have been times when you would have said it was because you couldn't afford it, just like you've told everybody else you couldn't afford anything.

You can sock it to the taxpayers. Hundreds and hundreds—in fact, \$2,000—a taxpayer in all the different charges, many of which you personally, Minister, have presided over through the scandalous increase in hydro rates, the scandalous increase in taxes you said you wouldn't impose. And yet when it comes time to find a little bit of money, relatively speaking, out of your budget of billions and billions of dollars and the \$3 billion in funds that you took in this past year, for Velcade, no way. Sorry: no money available from the government of Ontario.

We then have the fact that you managed to find money for the LHINs. There's a big, popular cause out there. You had \$160 million to create a new level of bureaucracy in the health care system, including of course the now infamous \$2 million that you guys, the McGuinty Liberals, spent on new furniture and office design for those LHIN offices. I was in one. I actually found it open, miracle of miracles, when I went out there. And I will say they received me very graciously and very pleasantly. I did have a chance to see some of that new furniture in that office. Why you would feel the need to spend \$2 million on new furniture for the LHIN offices as part of \$160 million for bureaucrats for health care I will never understand.

Here's what Ian Urquhart had to say about that in the Toronto Star on March 25: "Cutting through the euphemisms"—he's talking about the LHINs and all the different things that are referred to in the budget papers—"this suggests money will be saved by closing and consolidating hospitals, contracting out union jobs and discharging patients quicker and sicker." I asked, during the time the LHIN legislation was being debated in this House, if nobody ever intended to use the power to close or amalgamate hospitals without any oversight of the minister whatsoever, no oversight by cabinet, no oversight by anybody, if you didn't intend to use that power, why was it in the legislation? If you didn't intend—

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): It is not.

Mr. Tory: It is. Of course it is, and you know it. I don't know how you could possibly sit in this House and say it's not. It's right there. The language is plain as day that there are powers there to close and amalgamate hospitals. They were not in the Public Hospitals Act from 1999 to 2005, and you know it. But that's fine; we won't get bogged down in that.

How could you spend \$160 million creating this? And why the powers to close and amalgamate and cut services and transfer unilaterally donations from one place in the province to another, donations voluntarily given by hard-working Ontarians who wanted to support their community hospital? You've put a power in this bill that will just allow, at the stroke of a pen, for that to happen and that donation to be transferred. No consultation with the donor, no scrutiny by anybody—it just goes right out of that community. Why would you do that?

Now we've got no less an authority than Ian Urquhart answering. He's got it figured out. That's exactly what

you're going to do, and yet this is the same government that is awash in \$3 billion of unanticipated revenue, that used it on phony trust funds that are going to cost the taxpayers millions more in debt interest charges, but there's no money available to sort out some of these other problems in the health care system.

The justice system: This year you will spend more than three times the total amount of the justice system, at a time when people are more concerned than ever about crime, on debt interest charges, which you are driving up.

You're very fond, I say to the minister, of saying that what's up is up and what's down is down and all the rest. Well, what's up is up this year, and that is, spending is up big time and debt interest charges are up this year big time on your watch. You're forcing them up by having an artificial deficit when you could have and you should have balanced the budget. You could have done it and you should have done it. So at a time when you're going to spend three times the amount on debt interest charges that are just going off to various people to pay interest on our debt that's going up and continues to go up on your watch, we have a situation where we will surely have you in here before too long, as you have done many times before, saying that we really can't afford to deal with the issues in the justice system, where one third as much money as you're spending on debt interest is being spent on the justice system as a whole.

Of course, under your stewardship, I say with respect, the debt interest charges now are approaching the entire budget for the Ministry of Education. That's where we've arrived at on your watch: The debt interest charges have approached the entire budget of the Ministry of Education. "Pay more, get less and no results." Speak to the people from the post-secondary community. The people from the post-secondary community, the actual college and university presidents, don't know, if there's this huge share of \$6.2 billion being advanced, where it is. They don't know where it is. They can account for the money that's gone to student aid, some of which I think is a step forward, and I've said that before. But the rest of this \$6.2 billion—and you should check your budget address. You used the statement that "we have invested" \$6.2 billion. Well, it sure hasn't been invested yet, and those people are the first people to say that they haven't seen that much of it, especially the colleges. They would argue, I think with justification, that they are not getting their fair share, and they still rank 10th out of 10 after your initial efforts in this regard over the last period of time.

The second thing I'd like to deal with after "pay more, get less and no results" is the whole question—and I will deal with this briefly, but I think it's important—of the integrity of the budget process. The questions were asked by my colleague from Simcoe-Grey and by the leader of the third party or the member for Beaches-East York about the leaks this afternoon. I think for you to have done what you did, I say to the minister, by just dismissing it and not even really trying to answer that question, was unacceptable. It has been a long-standing

tradition—long before I was born and before all of us were here—that you kept budget information confidential and secret so that private interests of any kind could not benefit from knowing information about government decisions and public monies and taxation changes and so forth and so on.

As was correctly pointed out by someone this afternoon—I think it was my colleague from Simcoe—Grey—there is right now an investigation taking place about income trust legislation and who might have had even just a hint of what was going on there. We've seen the speculation on how much private interests could have benefited from early access to that information. It's no different here. I've been very careful, in what I've said about this, not to single out any person or any piece of land or anything else, because it doesn't really matter who knew. If anybody knew, it's not right, and it's clear that people knew.

Ministers of the crown were swanning around—not you, but others—at the Liberal fundraising dinner giving out details of this project and saying that it's going to happen and stand by for the good news and so forth and so on. I know, because I've heard from people who were there, that the conversations that were going on were pretty specific in terms of what was going to be in the budget and what wasn't. If you're so confident, as you said today, I say to the minister, that nothing wrong happened, all the information was wrong and so forth and so on, then you should have no reason whatsoever not to refer it to the OPP and have them look into it or anybody else you want. Send it to the Integrity Commissioner, but send it to somebody. If you're so convinced nothing is wrong, sent it over, and I'm sure they'll give you a clean bill of health. I will stand up, if some objective person like that—the Integrity Commissioner or the OPP—gives you a totally clean bill of health, and say, “Thank you for the investigation. I'm glad the integrity of the process has been upheld.” But when you stonewall like this, when you say, “There's nothing wrong; trust us; we're the bunch that always are straightforward with you,” there are always people who are going to be left out there, including us, because it's our job to be skeptical about these things and to represent the public interest in terms of things that look like they should not be.

I think there are big questions that are going to be arising in the days ahead. I don't disagree with what the minister said about the fact that it's better to under-promise and over-deliver. You guys should know that lesson better than anybody because you have sitting next to you from time to time the world champion of promise-breaking. There is no one who has surpassed his record in this regard. But having said that, when I was running a business, I generally felt that you were best to be prudent in terms of the projections that you were making. But for you to have the kinds of discrepancies that you've had in the accounts of Ontario supposedly taking place sometimes within a few weeks, where all of a sudden hundreds of millions of dollars just materialize out of nowhere to be available for your phony trust funds and slush funds

and buying by-elections and buying votes from people and so on—I think there's a lot to be probed there. I think it is not, again, such a matter of politics per se; it is a matter of principle, that the people of Ontario are entitled to have transparency when it comes to their financial records. It's a concept you learn very well when you have senior responsibility in business: that people are out there making their decisions in terms of their investments based on the truth and transparency and completeness of the records that they have in front of them and the statements that are put forward by the corporations in question. I don't know why any different rules or any different practices at all—at all—should apply to the government. There should be no difference. Why are the taxpayers of Ontario not entitled to the same degree of disclosure and transparency and accuracy and so on that is now required?

1600

It is very interesting that at precisely the time when the standards are being increased, the scrutiny is being turned up, the amount of time that is being spent in the corporate world making sure that you get the accounts right and that you have all kinds of third-party validation of them and so on, we are going in the opposite direction in terms of accountability, transparency, reliability and stability of the public accounts. It just isn't feasible that we would have had swings of the kind we had that go between different reports that you've given to the taxpayers with respect to their money.

I want to comment for a couple of minutes on the trust fund and what you're doing in that regard. We can all have our jousting back and forth in question period. I made it very clear today and I'll make it clear again that the notion that you would have made in this budget a commitment for increased transit investment in the GTA—and elsewhere, by the way. I mean, there were communities, I will say parenthetically, that have been utterly left out of this. But having said that, the notion that some of these projects in the GTA should receive a commitment for public investment from the government of Ontario I understand and support. What I have taken issue with is how you've chosen to finance this. I think most of the taxpayers watching out there will understand what I'm saying, and I think most people in business would understand.

Let's start with the business example. I was just saying to the media outside that there's a very good reason why it is very, very rare indeed that you would ever see a business permitted to book a huge sum of money in the hundreds of millions of dollars and expense it just before the end of a given year, when in fact that money won't actually be spent on the project in question until years later. The reason for that, of course, is that when people are making their investment decisions and so on, what you have is an artificial depression, an artificial making worse of the results of the company in that year when the money is not actually being spent, and five years from now, when the money is being spent, the results will look better than they should. So there is not transparency,

there is not an ability to see what the state of affairs or the public's finances are at the time the money is being spent or not being spent. It has created the illusion, which I think has been punctured now by many commentators, including those of us over here on this side of the House, that you actually couldn't balance the budget when everybody knows you could have; and that you created a phony deficit for political purposes to help you out next year, when in fact you could have made the very same commitment, you could have made the very same announcement in your budget with respect to these transit projects and that you would fund them as you presently estimated the money would come due in the outlying years, whether it's three, four, five, six years from now; you would fund it at that time. But in the meantime, you would not be putting taxpayers' borrowed money into a trust fund that you have created artificially, but you would be using that money to pay down the debt, pay down the deficit and bring the province closer to a balanced budget.

We know—and you didn't deny it today when you failed to answer the question, but by failing to answer it you didn't deny it either—that there will be an amount of interest. Whether I had the amount just right doesn't matter, because the bottom line is the principle involved here, which is that you are taking borrowed money and you are going to cost the taxpayers, I feel very confident in saying, tens of millions of dollars net—and I was fair in saying it was the net number, because I assume whoever the trustees are will invest the money in some way or other and get some interest for that. But you have to pay interest, because you're borrowing at 6.1%. I think that's what your budget documents say. So you're borrowing the money and paying 6.1%. To use the household example that I mentioned a few minutes ago, who in their right mind in Ontario, which taxpayer, would go out to the bank and arrange a mortgage and borrow the money from the bank and then put the money in a bank account and buy the house three years later? And all the while, during the three-year period, they'd be paying the bank interest on the money they had borrowed, and maybe, if they had it in the bank account, they'd be getting half that rate of interest back.

Nobody would ever do that, because it doesn't make any sense. You did it for political reasons. You could have made the commitment to transit without engaging in this kind of bogus accounting. I think it is wrong that you did it, I think it is misleading to the taxpayers, and I think it does not give them a fair assessment of what the public finances of this province are. I think you should be operating on the principle that you expense the money in the public accounts when you spend it, and not this deal where you've done it in some other way, at some other time.

I think we had here a budget in which you had choices, you and the rest of the government and the Premier, Mr. McGuinty. We've seen him make choices. He chose to promise not to raise taxes, and then he chose to bring in the biggest tax increase in the history of

Ontario. He promised and committed himself and solemnly said that he would help autistic children, and then, when the election was over and he had a chance to keep his word, he chose to ignore the fact that he'd made that promise in writing. He ranted and raved about downloading when he was the Leader of the Opposition, and then, when he came to government, he chose to increase the downloading on the municipal taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

Here we had a series of choices that sat in front of this government as it deliberated and tried to decide what to do with respect to its budget for the forthcoming year. One of the choices we've just been discussing was the choice of either balancing the budget or engaging in a series of accounting tricks and political manipulation of the public finances of Ontario. I think that the wrong choice was made in regard to what you did there. I think it was wrong for you to manipulate the accounts of Ontario. It was wrong for you not to make an effort to keep another promise you made: namely, to balance the books of Ontario as soon as possible. You could have and should have done it this year. I've said it before and I will say it again before I'm finished, because it's fundamental, that you didn't bother to do it.

I want to just quote from somebody who used to be a good friend of yours; he used to be a good friend of yours. It's just so typical. This guy was a good friend of yours—and his organization—when it suited Mr. McGuinty to be arm in arm with him, shoulder to shoulder, signing the commitment not to raise taxes and the commitment to abide by the Taxpayer Protection Act, which you have junked since you came to office. You've totally disregarded it and totally just written off any kind of respect for the taxpayers at all. John Williamson is quoted in a column in the *Toronto Sun* dated March 26. He just says the following: "Any politician who cannot balance the budget with such riches of tax revenues is not fit to control the public purse."

The fact of the matter is that you did make a choice. I respect the fact that it was your choice to make and you're accountable for it, and it's my job to stand here and say, not just because I'm the Leader of the Opposition but because I believe it in my heart, that you made the wrong choice. I can tell you right now that while I know you could have, and I believe strongly you should have, balanced the budget when you had the \$3 billion in extra revenue, had you taken some of the money that you put into the bogus trust fund and various other places, where you have dealt with it in a way that is just meant to create these slush funds for your own re-election and in order to create a deficit—had you taken some of it and made a meaningful move towards balancing the budget faster, recognizing the fact that you were awash in all this hard-earned extra money that taxpayers sent you, I would have still stood up here and said that you could have and should have balanced the budget, but I would have said that at least you took a little bit of it, less than you should have, and made a move to get closer to balancing the budget, which is what the taxpayers expect you to do.

They'll expect us to do it when we get to government, and there should be no reason around that when you have the kind of money that you had.

When we talk about the choice you made, it wasn't just a choice to say, "Well, I'll ignore it or overlook it," or whatever. It was a choice that was made whereby you actually took proactive steps, as I said, to create a deficit and to make sure you didn't balance the budget. Again, you want to talk about whether there was a leak or not. You might recall, before the subway was even in the news, there was a story quoting someone close to you indicating you were working really hard to make sure that you didn't balance the books and that you did have a deficit. Guess what? That turned out to be true as well. So there was a lot of leaking going on with respect to information about this budget. I'd be the first to suggest that it isn't as important, because I don't know that anybody could have had a private benefit from knowing that there was not going to be a balanced budget, but the bottom line is, in principle it's still wrong.

1610

Anyway, we have here a quote from the Brantford Expositor, from James Wallace's column, in which he says, talking about the choices you had:

"Instead the province found some extra cash and shovelled it out the door before year-end to avoid a legal obligation to pay down the deficit.

"Some plan."

I agree with him: Some plan that is.

Again, let's go back to the example of hard-working taxpayers across Ontario. I've said this; you've probably read that I said it. I know that you don't read all of what I say with anywhere near the attention you should, I say to the Minister of Finance, with great respect and just a tiny bit of affection—just a tiny bit.

By the way, I should tell you that my wife of some 28 years is here to listen to this speech today only because, after a year in this business, she has now come to recognize that my idea of a hot date is for her to come down and hear me speak in the Legislature. But the other reason she is here is because I told her the nickname of the Minister of Finance was Spanky. She asked me why that was, and I said, "You'll have to come down and ask him directly. I'm not at liberty to discuss it."

In any event, there were choices to be made on the year-end spending spree and what could have been done with it. It's back to the discussion about the fiscal imbalance between the province and the municipalities. Again quoting from James Wallace on March 25:

"In opposition, McGuinty said using property taxes that way was a 'disaster' waiting to happen.

"Municipal officials maintain the disaster has happened, that downloading is largely responsible for high property tax hikes across the province and is killing their ability to pay for programs, services and infrastructure."

You had a choice. You could have addressed this imbalance that has been created. You people remind me all the time—with great respect to the member for St. Catharines, when people say to me that this was the

result, intended or not, of the policy of the previous government, I say, "That is correct. Let's not spend time debating history. What's done is done." I wasn't here, but I can tell you what I have committed myself to doing. What I have committed myself to doing, which is a lot more than the McGuinty Liberals have done, is putting in place a meaningful, long-term process to fix it.

I think what people are looking for in politics today is some honesty, where, if your party brought in a policy in the past that had a certain effect, you would say, "Yes, that effect was not intended and we're going to fix it," and then you stick to that and you do it. In opposition, I say with respect to the member from St. Catharines, you people ranted and raved—all of you did—about this. I could come in here and spend hours reading speeches you made about this. Then you get into office and what do you do? You make it worse. You've done nothing to help whatsoever.

Another choice you had, I say to the Minister of Finance and to all the members of the government, is that you could have decided you were really going to focus on value for money, as opposed to going on a wild spending spree. I believe that the most telling tale of all with respect to the question of the disrespect that this Liberal, McGuinty government has for the taxpayers, for their money and for the question of value for money is the fact that in one year, between the last budget and this one, they haven't found one cent in additional savings. Even for this group, that is a hard record to surpass. I am surprised you did that badly. I know you don't care about waste in government; I know you don't care about doing things better, faster, cheaper or in a more customer-friendly way—I know you don't care about that—but to actually have a record where in a whole year you wouldn't have found one dollar in extra savings is scandalous.

I would love to hear an explanation. First of all, I've asked the minister today—it's about the fourth time I've asked—about the famous \$407 million that you found a year ago and that you haven't improved upon since. I've asked that you table the list, because it's not a round number. It's \$407 million, so I'm assuming that there's a very precise list available of efficiencies you found that total \$407 million. If you could bring that list, we would really appreciate it, because it would be good to see what you have done.

I think of it as a weak-kneed accomplishment on a budget of \$75 billion. If you can't find better than that on a budget of \$75 billion, with all the help you could get from any front-line public service worker or from an awful lot of taxpayers who, day in and day out, experience the inefficiency, the duplication, the running around and the red tape of this government, if you can't find more than \$407 million, it's a big disappointment.

But the other question is, why did you find nothing this year? Or, if you found something, why didn't you tell us about it? You've got to have it one way or the other: Either you didn't find anything this year, in which case you should just fess up and say, "We were too busy designing bogus trust funds and ways to spend the money

and shovel it out the door at the end of the year,” or, “We have just run out of steam. We don’t think there is any waste; it’s all dealt with.” This from the bunch that has increased the size of the government phone book by 100 pages this year. So the phone book is bigger by 100 pages. Now, you tell me what that’s all about. It ain’t directory assistance instructions or ads for Pizza Pizza. It’s 100 pages of extra stuff you’ve got in there, and we’re going to get to the bottom of it and figure out what it’s all about, because it certainly isn’t you finding inefficiency.

I want to talk about another choice that the government had.

Interjections.

Mr. Tory: You have your way for a couple of minutes while I take a sip of water.

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Tory: Mr. Speaker, the government people just can’t contain themselves. I don’t know whether they eat certain kinds of vitamins before they come in here to the Legislature, but I wish the taxpayers at home could hear all the interjections that take place during question period and other times. I think it would be very instructive for them to know. I raised the question in my budget speech last year of whether Mr. McGuinty has asked them to behave in a more civilized manner in the Legislature and they choose to ignore him, or whether he has told them it is okay to behave that way in this Legislature. I don’t know which it is, but it’s got to be one or the other.

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): This from the guy who’s sending out private detectives.

Mr. Tory: The member for St. Catharines has got himself particularly exercised this afternoon. I’m not sure about what, but never mind.

Another choice that existed for the Minister of Finance was the question of whether you did any long-term planning in the budget or whether you just engaged in one-time, vote-buying exercises; one-year, one-time, ad hoc payments. The answer is very clear from the budget, whether it’s the farmers of Ontario, who got well less than they needed, but again, one-time, short-term—as the minister herself described it this afternoon—money that actually represents a cutback in terms of the amount that has been committed compared to what we are going to see, the cutback next year; whether you see that—no long-term plan—or whether you see what’s been done with respect to roads and bridges in Ontario.

Again, what kind of planning can you do if you are leading or participating in a municipal government, whether you’re an elected official or a public servant, when your provincial government—at the last minute shovelling money out the door like there is a contest to see who can give it away fastest—gives you an amount of money and says it’s one time only for roads and bridges?

By the way, as the Minister of Finance well knows, there is no condition on those governments that they have to spend it on roads or bridges at all, a subject which the

Auditor General commented on very unfavourably last year. Why did he do that? He said that when you’re shovelling money out the door like there is a four-alarm fire at the end of the year, with no conditions and with no accountability, you are going to reduce the degree that you and he and everybody else—us—have to make sure that money is well spent.

Again, I know from my experience in business that when you are making last-minute, hurried decisions under pressure, especially when it comes to spending money, you are not going to make your best decisions. You and the government, Mr. McGuinty, consciously decided that you were going to rush the money out the door, to just keep shovelling it out as fast as it came in, and in so doing, I absolutely believe that you are not going to have made the best decisions, that they are not going to be subject to the kind of scrutiny the taxpayers expect, and that you once again will have comments from the Auditor General this year, in his report on this year’s accounts, saying that this is not the kind of scrutiny or respect for the taxpayers’ money that I think all of us, including all the taxpayers watching, have the right to expect.

The money for Toronto transit: The Toronto Star—heavens above, they find lots of reasons to be favourably disposed to the policies of the current government—called it a one-shot deal. I’m talking about the money, the \$200 million, for Toronto. What kind of a way is that to run this relationship? What kind of a way is it to run a sophisticated relationship about a city where I share your view that we have to do things to make the city stronger? I share your view. I have lived here my whole life. This city’s being strong is important to Ontario, as it is, by the way—and I will come to this in a moment—for rural Ontario to be strong as well. But a strong Toronto is very important to the well-being of Ontario. What kind of a way is it to run the relationship where year after year—and I’m not saying you are the first to do it. But why are we carrying on every year with this notion that people come running up here, there is a crisis—again, it’s a four-alarm fire—and at the end the result is always the same: There is some cockeyed scheme to write a cheque or forgive part of a loan or sell some hydro poles or whatever. What kind of a way is that to run the public finances of this city that we all agree is fundamental to the health of Ontario? What kind of a way is that to deal with the public finances of Ontario and the taxpayers’ money: Just shovel a couple hundred million bucks out the door because it sort of fills in a gap that exists in the budget?

I was asked on an Ottawa radio station this morning why that number matches up exactly to a 3% increase in property taxes when, they said, “We got 3.9% and we didn’t get any offer from the Minister of Finance to make up the difference between 3% and 3.9%.” I had no answer for that question. I told him to call you. Nonetheless—

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Hon. Jim Watson (Minister of Health Promotion): Call the former mayor.

Mr. Tory: "Call the former mayor" of Ottawa. That's a good idea. He has no answer either, though, so it doesn't matter. It would be a waste of 25 cents.

I say to the Minister of Finance, he's new to his job. He could have made a fresh start by putting into his budget the framework for a five-year plan or some other period of time like that to begin to meaningfully address the problems that exist, not just for Toronto but for all municipalities in the province of Ontario. But no, we had another—just like the roads and bridges for the smaller municipalities outside of Toronto and just like the transit money, we have the kind of one-time—and I think I was reading this and am recalling it now. On budget day, I noted with interest that it said in respect of the adjustment in social assistance that you would not require the municipality to pick up their share for 2006 only. So I'm assuming, for 2007, they will have to pick up their share. They have that pleasant surprise to look forward to next year, which will just make an additional contribution to the problem. I think I read that right, but you would know. It's your budget.

So I think when it came to that choice—one-term quick fix, ad hoc one-year schemes—you chose those in every case and didn't choose to do the long-term planning when you could nor to put in place a long-term fix for some of these problems that have been bedevilling these people for some period of time.

That brings us to the next choice you had. I've always believed—I've only been here for a year in this place, but I've been around politics as a volunteer for many other years and have been a keen student of politics—that when you were elected Premier of Ontario, you were elected Premier of all of Ontario, and when you were the Minister of Finance for the province of Ontario, you were the Minister of Finance for all of the province of Ontario. I said the day I became the leader of this party, on September 18, 2004, why do we always put ourselves in a position where we feel we have to make a choice, that the debate comes down to making a choice between saying, "Well, you can either give money to Toronto, the all-hated, nobody likes Toronto etc., or you can give money to all the other places in Ontario?"

I think most members of this House accept the fact that that is not the right question. The question is: How do you make sure that you take the available resources in an equitable fashion that reflects priorities and sound planning and proper stewardship of the taxpayers' money, some long-term planning and so forth, so that you would balance the interests of all the different parts of the province of Ontario? I say with respect to the minister that I think the McGuinty Liberal government has failed that test, and I think they've failed that test in a fairly dramatic fashion.

I was out even this weekend, and I don't go around—believe me, when I go and knock on doors, I have a message that I'm carrying to the doors, but it's not generally to raise questions of how you think you did in the budget, because most people would look at you a bit funny, I think, if you asked them that question. I had

people volunteering to me in places outside of Toronto that they didn't think they'd done very well, indeed, in this budget when compared to Toronto. I think that's unfortunate, because they are simply feeding back what they've heard and what they've read and what they've seen in terms of what people have said. I think that there was a time, and it was now, that we should have addressed some of the very serious issues that exist in other cities, in other towns and in rural Ontario generally, where things are tough.

I've had the great privilege and the great opportunity, and will have for another 18 months, to represent a rural riding in Ontario. There's no better learning experience than to sit face to face and to stand face to face, as many members here do, with people in the towns and on the streets, in the stores and in my riding offices, listening to them talk about the experiences they're going through now. Whether it is the stores that are not doing well because the farmers aren't spending money, whether it's the farmers themselves, whether it's the farm implement dealers, whether it's the car dealerships, and on the list goes, or whether it's the municipalities who are struggling to keep up in the face of what we've talked about earlier, none of these people is saying that they're doing very well at this point in time. And yet, I really do think that these areas of the province outside the GTA did not do as well as they deserve to do, given some of the challenges they're facing.

Let's start with Durham, not just because there's a by-election there, although that's a good reason to talk about it. There is a by-election on, and people are going to have a very important choice to make on Thursday of whether they want to reward a government that has broken its promises fundamentally on taxes and a thousand other things, whether they want to reward a Premier who has dramatically driven up wait times after picking their pockets to the tune of hundreds of dollars on the health tax, dramatically driven up the wait times in Durham, has done absolutely nothing to address transportation on the east side of the GTA amidst this potpourri of announcements that were made here, and so on.

So I'll quote no less an authority than Roger Anderson, chair of Durham region, quoted in the *Toronto Star*, March 25, 2006:

"One of these provincial governments are going to realize one of these days, to get into Toronto from the east, you have to come through Durham. It's going to be a problem if they don't start addressing it soon."

He goes on to say: "Business will not be able to move their goods and services effectively. People will still be sitting in traffic and gridlock. We are extremely concerned with the lack of attention to this area."

There is Roger Anderson talking about what he has to say about whether he feels that Durham was equitably dealt with. I think that's something the voters out there will want to keep in mind on Thursday when we get to the by-election.

Let's take a quote from the *Niagara Falls Review*. This is dealing with the issue of crime. It's a quote from the

Niagara Falls Review, and it goes like this: "Premier Dalton McGuinty gave Toronto cops \$5 million in January to combat the city's gun and gang violence.

"Later that month, Niagara Regional Police Chief Wendy Southall said cities outside Toronto—especially in border communities—needed financial assistance to counter the infiltration of the same problems plaguing Toronto.

"It was a good point then and still is. But Southall's submission apparently didn't register. Police weren't mentioned at all in the budget speech.

"The way the Liberals dealt with infrastructure and didn't deal with police ... suggests the rest of Ontario should watch how closely focused the Liberals are on Toronto."

That's from the Niagara Falls Review. I think that was, again, a choice that you made, and I think it was an unfortunate choice, because there are many needs that exist out there, whether it be crime, referred to in the Niagara Falls Review, whether it be the plight of a lot of municipal governments, whether it be their infrastructure needs, where I say what I've said before, namely, that they are participating, such as they can, in this lottery program where they spend thousands and thousands of dollars they don't have, putting in applications for COMRIF, only to then find that one in 10 of them actually gets any money. What kind of way is that to plan our infrastructure going forward? I'm not talking now about transportation infrastructure but about the infrastructure that carries the water and carries the sewage away. And this is the kind of thing they're confronting on a day-by-day basis.

You had another choice, I say to the Minister of Finance, and that was that you could have done something serious in light of the challenges facing our manufacturing economy and various sectors of our economy. It's very interesting to me that when we have the discussions in here about the 80,000 lost jobs in manufacturing, it is only occasionally—I would say I was not being fair if I said it was one time out of 10 when we talk about it—that any words are expressed on the government side of the House with respect to the fact that these people actually have lost their jobs. There are 80,000 families in the province of Ontario where people have lost their jobs and a family is without at least one paycheque in community after community. We've listed them before. And your answer, when we ask you about it—and we're just saying, "Well, what are you going to do for them, and what are you going to do in terms of the environment that caused people to make the decision to close those plants and move those investments and cut back on those jobs?" And the answer, I would say, nine times out of 10—I'll suggest it's possible that it's eight times out of 10—is that you remind me—and you've reminded me often enough that I know it's true and I always did—that there have been some net new jobs created in the province of Ontario. But that does not take away from the fact that 80,000 people in the past year alone lost their jobs. I think, actually, it is some com-

bination of insensitivity or arrogance that you don't acknowledge that, that you get up and read back to me your same old cue sheets with respect to how many net new jobs. And when you use the expression "net," of course that's the clever way of saying that you're referring to these people who are going through all kinds of heartache in some of those plants—I think I'm right in saying Domtar in Cornwall, for example, closes right about now, because they announced it three or four months ahead. And all we get is this net new jobs; don't worry, be happy; all the news is good. Well, just think of how much better off we'd be in terms of your—well, let's forget your accounts for a minute—how much better off we would be in the lives of those 80,000 families and the communities we live in if they still had those jobs.

But let's then move on from there. That's the most important thing: They would have the dignity of a job and the ability to support their families, and those communities would have that livelihood that has so many spinoff benefits to so many other people. But you would benefit. I think the estimates we calculated were to the extent of \$200 million of additional tax revenue that you would have. Now, I worry about that a bit, because you'd put it into a bogus trust fund or into some slush fund of yours for the election next year. But the fact is, you'd have the \$200 million and these people, more importantly, would have their jobs and the dignity of their jobs and the lack of heartache that they face today.

But you made a choice. You're going to carry on with the same old taxing, the same old spending, the same old, you know, just shovel it out the door and don't worry about anything, the same old level of regulation. And I am telling you, because I have sat with these business people—I know you have too, I say to the Minister of Finance—and they have told me—and I'm sure they've told you, because they're not going to tell you a different story—that the regulations and the taxes and the WSIB premiums and the electricity prices and all of those things are factors in the decision to wipe out jobs in the province of Ontario. And many, if not most, of those things are under your control and they're decisions you could take. They're decisions you could take.

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Here you are again, awash in \$3 billion in extra revenue, and you did a 5% acceleration in the reduction you're going to do on the capital tax, which those who are commenting on the budget have commented favourably on, except to say that if we really wanted to stimulate investment in the productivity of plants to save jobs and to re-equip plants to save jobs here so they can become more competitive and more productive at precisely the time when it's very attractive to buy equipment, as the minister knows, because of the high level of the Canadian dollar—there are lots of things that don't help us when the dollar is high, but one area it does help is in bringing down, in effect, the price of new equipment, and you could have made it even more attractive for people to go out when the dollar is high and buy now to re-equip those plants, and that creates jobs too, in the

province of Ontario. But you didn't. You opted instead for more spending, more taxing, more bureaucracy, higher energy prices, more red tape, more regulation, more WSIB premiums, and on it goes.

When people have asked me around this province, when I've gone on tours and sat in small business round tables and so on, what did I think you should do, I said the first thing you should do to try and get this economy on a better footing so that every one of your projections on the important stuff is not going down—job creation, down; economic growth, down—

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: Yes it is, over your projections from last year. Absolutely not.

Interjection.

Mr. Tory: Well, they're going up, but the trend line is that they're all down from where you said they would be last year, every one. Exports, job growth, economic growth—all down from where you said they would be last year, and you can't deny that.

Having said that, I say to people that the first thing you could do is stop doing some of the things you are doing: Stop with the high-taxing, high-spending, high-regulating, high-WSIB, high-bureaucracy government that you're giving people that is chasing jobs out of here and causing people to find it easier to make those decisions.

The last thing that I want to just make mention of, and I have already, is the situation of the farmers. I should say, by the way, I have a very excellent quote here, and I would want to share it with the people of Ontario, about the north. Because again, just on this whole business of regional inequity and the fact that you didn't do what you could have done to help other regions of the province—this is from the Daily Press in Timmins: "Doug West, a political science professor at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay ... said the Liberals clearly had next year's provincial election in mind when they drafted the budget, which he said offered virtually no help to northern Ontario.

"They're going to spend the money where the votes are, and the votes are in the GTA and the 905, the areas just around Toronto," said West." He goes on to say, "We don't have a lot of people, so we don't represent a lot of votes, and therefore we don't count—literally—in any electoral strategy, which this is part of." Amen. Professor West has got that one absolutely figured out, about why you have nothing that you are doing to help develop the north or to help it do better.

Last but not least, I think you can't mention the farmers often enough. I just want to quote from Joe Fiorito's column in the Toronto Star on March 27—today—where he's quoting a farmer by the name of William Matlovich, near Wallaceburg. He says, "Last year? I made \$15,000. I can't live on that.

"And then I asked him if he got depressed." This is Joe asking the farmer. "He paused. He looked away. He wasn't sure how to answer. He said, 'A lot of guys I know are on anti-depressants.'" And then later on, the

same farmer is quoted as saying this: "'Last summer, we drove by a strawberry farm. The berries were rotting in the field. The supermarket we go to was full of California strawberries.'

"He gestured to the other farmers"—the ones right outside the Legislature here—"mostly men, mostly older, mostly white." He said, "'The bad farmers are long gone. These are good farmers. What you see here is the cream of the crop. If we can't keep the cream of the crop, there's major trouble.'"

That's what is happening on your watch. I went out to see them right after your budget speech on Thursday last. I have seen disconsolate farmers a lot in my short time in provincial public life. I've never seen a group looking more disconsolate than that group out there, because they expected that you would do better, they thought you could do better, and I can say here, in addition to saying you could have and you should have balanced the budget, you could have done more for the farmers and you should have done more for the farmers. You should be ashamed of the fact that you chose not to.

The last couple of minutes, broken promises: I should say that I don't know why anybody would believe anything that's in this budget, quite frankly, because the predictions and forecasts on revenue and everything else are so bogus, and I know you make them bogus on purpose so that you can confuse us and confuse all the taxpayers and keep us off balance so that you can create these slush funds and so on.

There are so many broken promises on everything to do with taxation and balanced budgets and all the rest, but just look at something as simple as the establishment of the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. It has now appeared three years in a row in the budget that the government will move ahead to establish the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority. This is year three. I have no idea why we will be any more likely to see it happen, together with anything else in here, this year than we have any other year.

We've talked about the balanced budget. Agriculture: Remember the famous promise on agriculture from the McGuinty election platform that the Ministry of Agriculture was going to be a lead ministry. You know, you're leading us right over the abyss, down over the cliff into the pit, because the fact of the matter is that this year you're going to cut back on spending by \$244 million and leave the farmers and rural Ontario hung right out to dry, because you don't care about them.

I've said it before, and I don't say it with any disrespect to the rural members of the Liberal caucus, but even today we had another example of a question that I described earlier, and I'll describe again, as a self-congratulatory question, saying, "It isn't really so, Minister. Confirm it's not so. These people are being mean to say the farmers are being hurt. All the farmers on the front lawn are making this stuff up. We're doing everything we can for them; we're doing more than ever for them." The minister then stands up and says, "Yes, I can confirm that we're doing a fantastic job for the farmers.

That's why they're all so happy." It's time these people started to stand up on their hind feet in this Legislature and speak up for the farmers and say to the minister, "With the greatest of respect, you're not doing enough. These people are hurting. They need long-term plans. They need more help now." And you should get your money out the door, by the way, when the federal money has started to reach the farmers of Ontario and not a penny of your money announced two or three weeks ago has made it there at all.

So to conclude, I want to just say this, and then I've got to find this very excellent amendment—I have it here somewhere; here it is. That's the one. There is no long-term plan. I think that should be very disconcerting to people who are in business. I think it should be very disconcerting to people who work for business, who are employed in the province of Ontario. It should be very disconcerting to people who are looking to establish businesses here. It should be very disconcerting to people who are looking to expand businesses here. And I think it is. I think they're saying, "If we have a choice," and the Minister of Finance knows nowadays how many choices people have as to where they can invest, "between Ontario with its high-taxing, high-spending, high-regulating, sort of interventionist, short-term-fix type of government, we think maybe we'll go somewhere else."

They're talking with their feet. We haven't lost those 80,000 manufacturing jobs by accident. I think that is very painful because, going forward, we need those people in Ontario. We need them because they create jobs for our kids. We need them because they create spinoff activity for others. We need them because the taxation of their profits and the taxation of the incomes of people who work for them is the only place from which the money comes to finance health care and education on a go-forward basis without continuing to borrow that money, as the Minister of Finance continues to do even when he doesn't have to.

I have said before that I worry about the tactics that are being employed on the federal-provincial front. I do not think it is the right approach for this province and in the best interests of this province in resolving some of the issues we have with the federal government for the Premier, five or six weeks after the new Prime Minister has been sworn into office, to find every occasion he can to dump on him, when he said on day one that he would try to work with him. He said he would try to work with him, and yet since then we've not heard a word of that. We've just heard dumping. We hear it here in question period every day. There is no attempt made to establish a relationship with these people six weeks after they have come to office. I think the taxpayers are tired of it. I think they want to see their levels of government, regardless of what party stripe they have, working together, sitting together, working out plans for farmers and on various other subjects. I think that the approach the Premier has taken to dump on Mr. Harper from day one—well, after day one; he behaved well on day one, but since then it's been downhill all the way.

The second thing he did, which is a very questionable strategy indeed that I think will pay bad dividends for Ontario, is to have trumpeted the fact one day in front of cabinet, "Look, these guys have to get their act together, these other Premiers, these other sort of minions who come to the meetings with me, because we from Ontario are really the most important, don't you know? So they should really come and sit at my feet while I deliver the stone tablets from the province of Ontario and tell you how it's going to be." Last time I checked, you had to have the agreement of the Prime Minister and the government of Canada and the other provinces, or at least most of them, to get a new deal on the fiscal relationship between Ontario and Canada.

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I would just suggest to you that demeaning the other provinces of this country and belittling and dumping on the Prime Minister of Canada six weeks into office, before he's even delivered his throne speech and met Parliament once, I don't think is a strategy that is in the best interests of this province. I would suggest that there is nothing more important that we can do—aside from the investment climate I talked about earlier and what we can do to encourage enterprise, encourage investment and so on—than to effectively, constructively and in a balanced way address this issue that we have an opportunity to address. Mr. Harper, unlike his predecessor, Mr. Martin, who never really even admitted there was a problem, has said there is a problem and he's said he's determined to fix it. So why don't we take advantage of that and give him a chance to fix it and work with him instead of deciding that from day one we're going to dump on him and decide he is, before he's even met Parliament once, *persona non grata*.

I want to finish on this note before I move my amendment to the budget motion. I think this province is a place of absolutely unparalleled opportunity. We are not where we are today by accident. We have had good management over the years from many different governments. We've created an investment climate that made it attractive for people to come here. We've had an education system that has been a great equalizer and has helped people to move forward and get jobs and so on. We have had a very vital private sector, with people who take the risks, make the investments and make the innovations. That's where most of the economic activity comes from.

I'm optimistic. When people say to me at functions I go to, "What about Alberta? Are we all kind of worried about that?" I say, and I'm sure you say the same thing, "Look, I'm happy for Alberta that they should be doing well because of their resource riches, but if you ask me if I'm worried about the province of Ontario relative to that, not really." You have to take account of the impact of energy prices, but we have a wealth-creation machine in the province of Ontario that can create jobs for people, can raise the standard of living for people and can produce the revenues that the government of Ontario needs to make sure we look after our most vulnerable

people, as we should be doing, and as you missed the opportunity to do, by the way, awash in \$3 billion of extra revenue. But we have the ability to have that kind of wealth created so that we can provide excellent public services, redistribute that wealth and, at appropriate times, reduce the level of taxation so as to encourage more investment, more wealth creation and so on and to address the provincial-municipal fiscal imbalance and so on. It is only up to us as to whether we want to seize the opportunity to do that. You don't do that when you are doing short-term, one-off fixes. You don't do that when you're so focused on your own political well-being that you actually place it ahead of the public interest in terms of real long-term planning and real planning that respects the taxpayers, that respects their money.

People work hard to send their money down here, to Ottawa and to the municipalities, and I think when they see the Minister of Finance or whoever it is playing games with that money, they're disconsolate about that. I think it's one of the reasons why people have lost faith in politicians and why we rank at the bottom of the list of all the professions and all the trades. What a sorry statement that is. That's for another day, but I think it's in part because they see this kind of games-playing going on. They see the gamesmanship with the federal government instead of a real, earnest, genuine, sincere commitment to work together with the two governments.

So I think that at the end of the day we can do better. We have the fundamentals here in place in the province of Ontario, and that's not to the credit of any government. That's to the credit of the people of Ontario, who have worked hard for decades and decades. They've had governments of all parties over time that have made good decisions and, frankly, governments of all parties that have made bad decisions.

I think the question now is, are we prepared to look forward and do the kind of long-term thinking and long-term planning that places the public interest ahead of politics and says that we're not going to be engaged in this kind of one-term thinking, that we're going to look at the public interest and we're not going to try and fool the public? We are going to conduct ourselves in a prudent manner. We're going to work co-operatively with the other levels of government and with business and with labour.

I just see a lot of things that trouble me about this budget and that cause me to believe that we're not going in the right direction. Overall, there will be a price to be paid for this budget. There will be a price to be paid in dollars and cents in terms of increased debt charges and other charges to the taxpayers. There will be a price to be paid in public confidence because they think they're being fooled by games-playing and by bogus accounting and so forth. There will be a price to be paid in terms of more jobs lost as people see that you didn't do anything when you could to help create a more attractive environment for investment. There will be a price to be paid in terms of the most vulnerable people not getting the

kind of help you could have provided to them. There'll be a price to be paid in terms of people not having the kind of strength at the municipal level that we need to build the other infrastructure that didn't get talked about much in this budget. There are going to be a lot of prices to be paid for the choices that you've made. I think that's unfortunate.

It is unfortunate as well that, instead of standing up and saying that I second or will wholeheartedly get up and support the motion that calls on this House to support the budgetary policy of the government, I feel it is important, and incumbent upon me, to move the following amendment to the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 23, 2006, "That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following the words "That this House" and adding thereto the following:

"recognize that the budgetary policy put forward by the Minister of Finance continues the McGuinty government's legacy of broken promises and demands more and more from taxpayers while delivering less and less, and that this House condemns the government for:

"Not living up to its promise to balance the budget and actually making strong efforts to avoid doing so;

"Using questionable accounting tricks to inflate an artificial deficit that suits their own political agenda;

"Failing to support Ontario farmers in their plight while simultaneously cutting the Ministry of Agriculture more than \$240 million;

"Suffocating the Ontario economy and competitiveness with out-of-control taxation, spending, and ill-advised electricity policy and allowing Ontario to fall further and further behind the rest of the country in economic success and growth;

"Losing more than 80,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs under their watch and failing to have an overall plan that will aid the many communities now affected by mass layoffs and plant closures;

"Allowing and implementing more than \$2,000 in government fees and charges to accumulate on Ontarians' pocketbooks under their watch and as a result of their policies.

"Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House."

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Tory has moved that the motion moved by the Minister of Finance on March 23, 2006, "That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government," be amended by deleting the words following the words "That this House" and adding thereto the following:

"recognize that the budgetary policy put forward by the Minister of Finance continues the McGuinty government's legacy of broken promises and demands more and more from taxpayers while delivering less and less, and that this House condemns the government for:

"Not living up to its promise to balance the budget and actually making strong efforts to avoid doing so;

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"Allowing and implementing more than \$2,000 in government fees and charges to accumulate on Ontarians' pocketbooks under their watch and as a result of their policies.

"Therefore, the government has lost the confidence of this House."

Further debate?

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): The government House leader, Mr. Bradley, gives me no alternative but to move adjournment of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2006, on the motion for third reading of Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Further debate? Does any member wish to speak?

If not, Mrs. Chambers has moved third reading of Bill 210. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. Carried.

Be it resolved that this bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Orders of the day?

Hon. James J. Bradley (Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader): I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This House is adjourned until 1:30 of the clock on Tuesday, March 28.

The House adjourned at 1651.

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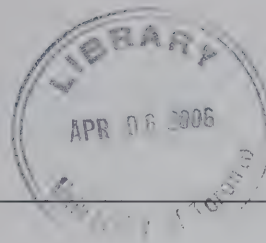
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No. 50A

N° 50A

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**
Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**
Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Tuesday 28 March 2006

Mardi 28 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 mars 2006

The House met at 1330.

Prayers.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe-Grey): Councillor Lynn Silverton of Grey Highlands Council contacted me earlier this week to once again plead the case for more doctors in the Markdale area. Although I've raised this matter on many occasions before in this House, the McGuinty government has done very little to help alleviate the crisis situation.

As a former Minister of Health, I know it is difficult for any government to attract doctors to a specific area, but one thing this government can do is build a new hospital in Markdale. The current hospital is over 50 years old, and without major repairs the facility will soon not be able to meet the needs of the residents of Markdale, Flesherton, Dundalk and its surrounding rural areas. It's the only hospital between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor, and serves almost 20,000 residents.

The hospital plays a vital role in response to motor vehicle accidents and also responds to the seasonal needs of the area's dynamic skiing community.

For the residents of Grey Highlands, the hospital offers 21 beds for in-patient care, an obstetrical service, general surgery and plastic surgery, and employs 89 staff members. Sadly, these services are provided in a building that is functionally obsolete.

As the Minister of Health well knows, the new hospital is planned for the Grey Gables site, where the Centre Grey General Hospital Foundation is leading the redevelopment campaign with the experienced assistance of people like Dr. Hamilton Hall, Pat Campbell, Ron Lipsett, Brian Mullin and Wayne Ferris.

We have a very serious doctor shortage in this area. I want to thank Ministers Smitherman and Caplan for meeting with me and my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and hospital officials back in November 2005. Now I call upon them once again to help us attract new doctors to the area by providing the people of this part of Grey county with the type of health services they certainly need and certainly deserve.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Vic Dhillon (Brampton West-Mississauga): I'm very proud to rise today to represent the citizens of

Brampton West-Mississauga after all the good news in our government's latest budget.

Investments in Brampton and Mississauga announced by our government since we took office in 2003 include the Highway 410 extension to Highway 10; the Highway 427 environmental assessment; the new Brampton Civic Hospital; redevelopment of Brampton Memorial Hospital; the new cancer centre at Credit Valley Hospital; additions to the Trillium Health Centre in Mississauga; additional carpool lanes on Highway 403 in Mississauga; a \$95-million contribution to Brampton's rapid transit program, AcceleRide; \$65 million in this year's budget for Mississauga's Transitway; gas tax funding for Brampton and Mississauga transit; GO Transit investments; a GTA youth centre; small class sizes; textbooks and education investments; and more police officers. These initiatives amount to well over a \$1-billion investment in Brampton and Mississauga since our government's election in 2003.

After eight years of Conservative rule, Brampton and Mississauga were in a situation of regressive policy and deficits, and infrastructure, health and education deficits. Highway 407 was sold for short-term political opportunism. That is a great example of Conservatives working against the public interest. Our residents have been shortchanged by previous governments for far too long. Our government—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Once again, a mother is grieving for the loss of her young son. Jared Osidacz was laid to rest last Friday after he was murdered by his father. Jared will be remembered as a hero who died protecting two friends under attack by this violent and abusive man.

In 2002, Jenny Latimer of Burlington fled with her sons Kevin and Liam to Halton Women's Shelter after suffering constant verbal, emotional and physical abuse. When Jenny first made application to the courts to protect herself and her children, the father was granted supervised access, but within a few months this order was changed to grant unsupervised access outside the jurisdiction of the family. Kevin Latimer-Campbell died just three days short of his second birthday, five months after he plunged from a third-storey window in his father's apartment. According to the media, his father was unaware that Kevin had even fallen.

In May 2004, I introduced Kevin's Law in his memory to give a voice to children who suffer from abuse and die. Today I am retabling Kevin's Law in the absence of any commitment by the McGuinty government to protect children who are under parental access order by the court. This legislation was passed unanimously by this House on May 20, 2004, and sent to the Legislature's standing committee on justice policy, yet Minister Papatello chose to let it die on the order paper. Worse yet, there have been several bills before this House that could have been amended to include these important child protections. The McGuinty government only talks about protecting children from domestic violence. Kevin's Law is an example of how—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): "I was lucky I was sitting in a chair," said East Ferris Mayor Bill Vrebosch at the news that the municipality of East Ferris would be receiving \$456,000 for infrastructure for his community through the Move Ontario program announced in our 2006 provincial budget last Thursday.

Mayor Barb Groves of Chisholm told me on Friday that the new funding of \$130,000 for her community means they will be able to repair two bridges this year instead of one.

Bill Brazeau, the mayor of Callander, noted that \$291,000 in his community is going to help them out a lot.

The mayor of North Bay stated that highlights in the budget for the city of North Bay included permission to spend the gasoline-tax-sharing funds on transit operations. The city is also receiving nearly \$3.4 million for roads and bridges and an additional \$1 million which can be used for the city's operations or capital this year.

Our government's plan is working for the north by investing in what matters most to the people of northern Ontario: education, health care and infrastructure. We are building opportunity and strengthening the economy, creating jobs and prosperity for all of us. Through Move Ontario alone, our government is investing over \$5 million in the riding of Nipissing. Municipalities will determine their own road and bridge priorities.

The 2006 budget builds on the McGuinty government's investments in northern Ontario, including our \$1.8-billion investment over five years to upgrade and expand highways under the northern Ontario highway strategy, which of course includes the four-laning of Highway 11. We are building on our investments in the north through the 2006 budget.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): Today I bring to the Legislature's attention the total neglect in the McGuinty budget for Durham region. The McGuinty Liberals' year-end spending spree effectively shut out Durham region. While the Liberals rushed to shove about \$1 billion into a slush fund to spend on transit and roads in other parts of the GTA, Durham

region was noticeably excluded in the one-time investment to help GTA municipalities.

It is clear that the Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty is incapable of representing this region. It appears that Premier McGuinty does not consider Durham region a high-priority area.

1340

Well, I can assure you that the Progressive Conservative candidate in Whitby-Ajax, Christine Elliott, does, and she is prepared to fight for fair funding for the people in Durham. She will fight for funding to extend the 407, expand the 401 and for GO trains. She will fight for fair funding of Durham hospitals. Today the residents in Whitby-Ajax continue to pay the illegal health tax while wait times in that riding are going up and services and staff are cut.

Governing is about choosing priorities. Last Thursday, Dalton McGuinty made his choice in his budget, and it didn't include the people of Durham and Whitby-Ajax. This Thursday, the electors of Whitby-Ajax get to make their choice to support a candidate who will stand up for them.

HAMILTON CENTRE FOR CIVIC INCLUSION

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): Fostering a positive and inclusive community requires dedicated space to fight discrimination and reduce barriers. I rise this afternoon to celebrate an important step in meeting that goal: the creation of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion.

Last week, the city of Hamilton provided \$125,000 for the establishment and operation of this new resource centre to encourage the participation and integration of members of immigrant, refugee and visible minority groups in the Hamilton community. In fact, more than 5,000 newcomers choose Hamilton as their home each year, 24% of Hamilton's population are immigrants and over 100 languages are spoken in our city.

Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative, established by former Mayor Robert Wade and comprised of over 70 organizations and 100 dedicated volunteers, spearheaded the creation of the centre for civic inclusion in partnership with the Settlement and Integration Services Organization, with the help of the United Way and the Hamilton Community Foundation. These numerous organizations and individuals worked extremely hard to establish the centre, which will combat racism at all levels of the community and create space for greater involvement by our diverse ethnoracial communities.

I want to congratulate my former colleagues on city council for taking this move. I urge the provincial government to follow the example of the city of Hamilton and provide needed tangible supports for the centre at the same time. I am proud to welcome the addition of the centre for civic inclusion to the city of Hamilton.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): I stand in my place today to report some of the feedback I heard from key stakeholders regarding last Thursday's budget, a budget designed largely to address the infrastructure deficit our government inherited when we came to office in 2003. The mayor of Cornwall, Phil Poirier, was quite pleased with the budget, saying that our investment in municipal infrastructure will go a long way towards helping the city complete much-needed and long-overdue water and waste water projects.

I have heard critics accuse our government of going on a spending spree with this budget—I just heard it. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am proud of the balance our government has struck between reducing the deficit the last government ran up and investing in the public infrastructure the last government allowed to crumble. Our government recognized that these investments in municipal infrastructure could not be put off any longer. Leading up to the budget, I met with representatives from the Canadian Automobile Association. They referenced the Ontario Auditor General's statement that roadway construction costs can jump from "\$1,000 to \$250,000 per lane kilometre over 15 years if proper maintenance schedules are not followed."

To call this investment a spending spree implies that roads, public transit lines, hospitals and schools are unimportant, and that money invested in them is wasted. With this attitude, it is no surprise that our important public works and services were so severely neglected by the last government. I am pleased to be part of a government that recognizes that building strong public infrastructure builds a stronger Ontario.

INSULIN PUMPS

Mr. Michael Gravelle (Thunder Bay–Superior North): While last week's Ontario budget delivered good news to all parts of the province, there seems little question that the most widely praised aspect of it was a decision to fully fund insulin pumps for up to 6,500 children in the province.

As a private member from northwestern Ontario, I had the privilege of bringing forward legislation calling on our government to take this action. While my name was on the bill, it is no exaggeration to say that the overwhelming support this effort received, both inside the Legislature and all across the province, made this an unusually non-partisan campaign.

Time does not permit me to thank all the people who supported this crusade, but certainly the Canadian Diabetes Association and the Ontario Diabetes Action Partnership were tireless and inspiring in their efforts. If, however, I can pick one person who helped me truly understand what an enormous difference an insulin pump can make in day-to-day living, I must thank Derek Lawrence, a Thunder Bay teenager who bravely allowed his story to be told and whose life was indescribably

changed with the insulin pump. He represented to me the thousands of young people across the province who will no longer have to fight to have this life-altering pump become a normal part of their lives.

On behalf of all those who never gave up in their efforts to see this happen, I thank the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health and our government for having the wisdom and compassion to make this dream a reality. It proves that if enough people believe in something and are willing to fight for it, truly good things can happen.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): We have a new political entity in this province, and his name is Janus Tory. All members will recall that Janus was the Roman god with two faces. Unlike mere mortals, this demigod could speak out of both sides of his face at the same time.

In yesterday's response to the budget speech by the leader of the official opposition, he stated quite clearly that he felt the Minister of Finance should have used the extraordinary revenue available to him at year end and balanced the books. The Hansard will show that he said quite clearly, "I believe strongly that you should have balanced the budget." But our newest resident of Mount Olympus then spoke directly to the farmers and said, "You could have done more for the farmers and you should have done more for the farmers." Exactly how was the minister to do more when, in true Janus-like fashion, you disagreed with what he actually did?

When my farmers learned that you disagreed with the Minister of Finance's decision to help them by way of \$125 million in special assistance, they were, frankly, appalled. When the municipal leaders of my riding learned that you disagreed with the Minister of Finance's decision to upload some \$188 million of costs for long-overdue repairs to aging rural roads and bridges, they were dismayed. More than one of them said to me, "Once a downloader, always a downloader."

MPAC REPORT, OMBUDSMAN

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that I've laid upon the table a report of the Ombudsman of Ontario, made pursuant to section 11 of the Ombudsman Act, with regard to the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Standing order 62(a) provides that "the standing committee on

estimates shall present one report with respect to all of the estimates and supplementary estimates considered pursuant to standing orders 59 and 61 no later than the third Thursday in November of each calendar year.”

The House not having received a report from the standing committee on estimates for certain ministries on Thursday, November 17, 2005, as required by the standing orders of this House, pursuant to standing order 62(b), supplementary estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, and Ministry of Transportation are deemed to be passed by the committee and are deemed to be reported to and received by the House.

Pursuant to standing order 61(c), the supplementary estimates before the committee of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Ministry of Finance and Management Board Secretariat, not selected for consideration, are deemed to be received and concurred in.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

KEVIN'S LAW (CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2006

LOI KEVIN DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Mr. Jackson moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 83, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and the Coroners Act to better protect the children of Ontario / Projet de loi 83, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et la Loi sur les coroners pour mieux protéger les enfants de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may make a brief statement. No.

1350

CARCINOID CANCER AND NEUROENDOCRINE TUMOURS AWARENESS MONTH ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LE MOIS DE LA SENSIBILISATION AU CANCER CARCINOÏDE ET AUX TUMEURS NEUROENDOCRINIENNES

Mr. Craiton moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to proclaim the month of May as Carcinoid Cancer and Neuroendocrine Tumours Awareness Month / Projet de loi 84, Loi proclamant le mois de mai Mois de la sensibilisation au cancer carcinoïde et aux tumeurs neuroendocriniennes.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): It gives me great pleasure to introduce a bill to shine some light on a very dark disease. But before I do that, I'd like to thank the many people who have come from across Ontario and are in the galleries to support the introduction of this bill. In the group is a former colleague of mine, Alderman Carolyn Ioannoni of Niagara Falls, a carcinoid cancer survivor, and her close friends Liz and Kaitlin Brown, whose son Justin unfortunately was not a survivor.

I'm asking this House to name the month of May as Carcinoid Cancer and Neuroendocrine Tumours Awareness Month. Carcinoid cancer and its related tumours are small-growing tumours found mostly in the gastrointestinal system. Since this type of cancer grows very slowly compared to other cancers, it usually takes many years before the tumours become sizable or cause symptoms. By then, it's too late. As it is a rare form of cancer, carcinoid cancer is not well known. Unfortunately, carcinoid is discussed very little in the public and has a low profile in the medical community. Its presence can be easily missed. If caught earlier, the disease is very curable. If not caught, it can be deadly.

It's essential to raise the level of public awareness of carcinoid cancer and neuroendocrine tumours, so it's appropriate that this House shed some light on this little-known but deadly form of cancer by naming the month of May Carcinoid Cancer and Neuroendocrine Tumours Awareness Month. I'm proud and honoured to bring this bill forward.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I believe we have unanimous consent to move a motion without notice regarding the standing committee on public accounts.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated June 17, 2004, during the months of March, April and May 2006 the standing committee on public accounts may meet on Thursday mornings until 1 p.m. and on Thursday afternoons following routine proceedings.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

HOUSE SITTINGS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I

move that, pursuant to standing order 9(c)(i), the House shall meet from 6:45 to 9:30 on Tuesday 28 March 2006 for the purpose of considering government business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Mr. Caplan has moved government notice of motion 79. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1355 to 1400.

The Speaker: All those in favour will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Arnott, Ted	Gravelle, Michael	Ramal, Khalil
Arthurs, Wayne	Hardeman, Ernie	Ramsay, David
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoy, Pat	Rinaldi, Lou
Bartolucci, Rick	Jackson, Cameron	Runciman, Robert W.
Bentley, Christopher	Jeffrey, Linda	Ruprecht, Tony
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kular, Kuldip	Sandals, Liz
Bountrogianni, Marie	Kwinter, Monte	Scott, Laurie
Broten, Laurel C.	Leal, Jeff	Smith, Monique
Brownell, Jim	Levac, Dave	Smitherman, George
Cansfield, Donna H.	Matthews, Deborah	Sorbara, Gregory S.
Caplan, David	Mauro, Bill	Takhar, Harinder S.
Chambers, Mary Anne V.	McNeely, Phil	Tascona, Joseph N.
Chudleigh, Ted	Miller, Norm	Van Bommel, Maria
Colle, Mike	Mitchell, Carol	Watson, Jim
Cordiano, Joseph	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Wilkinson, John
Crozier, Bruce	Munro, Julia	Witmer, Elizabeth
Delaney, Bob	Parsons, Ernie	Wong, Tony C.
Dombrowsky, Leona	Patten, Richard	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	Peters, Steve	Yakabuski, John
Duncan, Dwight	Phillips, Gerry	Zimmer, David
Gerretsen, John	Qadri, Shafiq	

The Speaker: All those opposed will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Bisson, Gilles	Martel, Shelley
Horwath, Andrea	Prue, Michael

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 62; the nays are 4.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I'm pleased to advise members of the House of an important next step in building Ontario's conservation culture, one which ensures that the most vulnerable in our society will be able to benefit from lower energy costs. Earlier today, I joined with Peter Love, Ontario's chief conservation officer, and Dr. Gordon Chong, chairman of the Social Housing Services Corp., to announce the conservation bureau's financial support for the Social Housing Ser-

vices Corp. Green Light initiative. This province-wide initiative will help further energy conservation in the social housing sector. This investment of more than \$9 million is the first part of a larger program that will generate up to 100 megawatts of energy savings in the low-income sector, enough electricity to power 30,000 homes. This is a significant step in meeting our government's commitment to make energy conservation and energy efficiency a key part of Ontario's energy future.

Our government directed the Ontario Power Authority, through its conservation bureau, to make energy savings for low-income Ontarians a priority. They have been moving forward with this important decision. As Dr. Chong noted, social housing providers are dealing with rising energy costs: "With the conservation bureau's support, they will have the ability to take concrete steps to reduce energy consumption in their buildings. That's good news for them, for their funders and for the environment."

We want all Ontarians to have the tools and the opportunities to participate in a conservation culture, and we especially want to help to ensure that those Ontarians who have few financial resources will not be unfairly penalized, as we all have to address the real costs of electricity. This innovative program will help low-income Ontarians and service providers save energy and money. It is just one of the many steps we are taking as we provide the leadership and the action that will achieve a profound societal shift to create this culture of conservation. We can achieve significant savings for all Ontarians by reducing our overall electricity demand and, more particularly, by reducing our peak demand.

As many of you know, our government has established two important goals: to reduce Ontario's peak electricity demand by 5% by 2007 and to reduce consumption in our own government operations by 10% over the same period of time. We are achieving both goals. By undertaking energy-efficient retrofits and upgrades to our government buildings and by committing to deep water cooling, we are more than halfway toward meeting our own internal target of 10%.

We have also taken key actions toward our province-wide goal. Our government has given direction to the conservation bureau to obtain an additional 1,300 megawatts of conservation and demand-side management initiatives. We have invested in a wide range of sector-specific pilot projects in social housing, as I'm announcing today, and also in agriculture, schools, home construction and small businesses.

We've made it possible for our local electricity distribution companies to access approximately \$160 million over three years for conservation programs that reach their communities. I'm here to say that the local distribution companies, the utilities in this province, have stepped up to the mark and are doing phenomenal things in their communities to reduce energy consumption on behalf of their clients.

We created the conservation bureau and Ontario's first chief energy conservation officer to ensure that we fully

exploit Ontario's conservation potential. We can see the benefit of this dedicated approach in today's announcement of more than \$9 million in conservation funding.

In addition, as I indicated, the local distribution companies have undertaken innovative conservation and demand-side management projects, and we are hoping that many of these successful initiatives will be completely and fully supported by the work of the conservation bureau.

Our government also recently launched, in partnership with the local distribution companies, the powerWISE conservation public awareness program. Through television and print advertising, we are encouraging all Ontarians to conserve electricity, but we've also put into place net metering, a regulation that allows individuals to generate their own power from renewable resources and send any excess electricity back to the grid for credit.

We are committed to smart metering as a valuable tool to shift demand. We will deliver 800,000 smart meters by 2007 and have them fully installed across the province by 2010. Smart meters will give consumers the tools they need to manage their electricity use and ultimately lower their bills.

Recently, this House had third reading on Bill 21, the Energy Conservation Responsibility Act, which will help Ontario's public sector to further lead the way in energy conservation and help us manage those energy costs. It will require ministries, agencies and broader public sector organizations to prepare and publish conservation plans on a regular basis. It will also help to remove the barriers to energy conservation that may exist in current codes or bylaws.

Another bill that is before the House, Bill 51, if passed, will have important conservation impacts for municipalities. This legislation proposed by my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs includes key provisions that give municipalities new authority to set conditions for how new subdivisions are designed in ways that maximize energy efficiency.

Together, these initiatives help create the conditions for a culture of conservation. They are steps that will help Ontarians realize the substantial environmental and economic advantages of using their electricity more wisely. Today's announcement of more than \$9 million to support Social Housing Services Corp.'s Green Light initiative ensures that all Ontarians, including our most vulnerable citizens, will fully share in these benefits.

We recognize that this is phase one. Phase two will come next month, and it's just the beginning, as we continue to roll out the conservation initiatives across this province that engage all Ontarians to help and understand their need to use their energy wisely and to create that culture of conservation much needed in this province.

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IMMIGRATION WEBSITE

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): I would like to inform the honourable

members of an important event that took place earlier this month while the House was adjourned. On March 7, at the Toronto Reference Library, I was proud to launch the Ontario government's first-ever international website portal dedicated to helping newcomers and potential newcomers start their new lives here in Ontario.

The website is Ontarioimmigration.ca. This website is a whole new way of saying, "Welcome to Ontario. Here is the information you need to get started," as it will provide potential immigrants with vital information in their source country before they even come to Ontario.

Each year, 125,000 newcomers choose Ontario as their home. We welcome more immigrants than any other province, and our province is better for it. As Ontario's population ages and our birth rate flattens, immigration becomes essential to our labour force and economy. We need the skills, global experience and willingness to work that newcomers bring.

Our new immigration website portal helps newcomers get up-to-date information about everything they need to know to start their new lives in Ontario, from starting a new business to discovering information about Ontario's vibrant communities, big and small.

It also promotes Ontario around the world online. We're showcasing our cities, towns and rural areas on this website, and we're welcoming newcomers to find out about Ontario before they choose to come here.

Newcomers can download key forms, such as immigration papers or a driver's licence application, and they can get answers to questions such as the following: "How do I enrol my children in school?" "What is the cost of housing and accommodation in various parts of Ontario?" "Where do you go to improve your language skills?" "What documentation would be helpful for a smooth transition into the labour force?"

Our new Ontarioimmigration.ca website will get people thinking about choosing Ontario. Then it will help them make the most of their new lives after they get here, so they can access all of Ontario's services, from health care to bridge training and language programs.

The website has 300 links to other Internet sites, and we're adding more. It provides convenient, one-window access to information and services from all three levels of government and from community organizations in every corner of this province. In the past, newcomers had to work to find the information they needed. This makes it much easier, whether you're in Mumbai, Lahore or Shanghai.

Ontarioimmigration.ca is a partnership with the federal government under the new Canada-Ontario immigration agreement, which I was proud to sign last November, an agreement which will see \$920 million of new federal investment in Ontario so that newcomers will be better able to reach their goals.

Municipalities are also partners in this project. Toronto, Windsor-Essex, Sudbury, Ottawa and London are the first cities to be featured on the immigration website. This will enable potential immigrants to investigate the incredible opportunities available in Ontario's

great communities, who see newcomers as a source of entrepreneurship, creativity, and economic and social value. This is their chance to attract newcomers to their communities and profile themselves internationally.

You may have seen our television ads informing newcomers about services available through our website. These ads are in 20 languages to reach as many people as possible. The ads also serve as a tremendous reminder to all Ontarians about the benefit that newcomers bring to our communities and economy.

Ontarioimmigration.ca has already registered over 28,000 visits—over 1,300 hits per day—and we have just begun. As we move forward, we'll keep adding new information, new links, and profiling more Ontario cities and towns.

The Ontarioimmigration.ca website is an international gateway to Ontario and its many diverse towns and cities. We are helping newcomers make the most of their new lives here and helping them to contribute to Ontario, because when newcomers succeed, Ontario succeeds.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response?

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): I'm pleased to respond today to the statement by the Minister of Energy. What we heard here was mostly a rehashing of old announcements, which took up 90% of that announcement today, but I will say that finally we're actually hearing something about conservation, because three years into this mandate we've heard little on conservation other than a lot of talk. We are actually seeing some money, and that is good.

But I would ask the minister, what have you been doing, for example, about the energy appliance program we had in place that you cancelled and that has led to increased energy consumption because you failed to act on that during your mandate here? Last summer, there was a record consumption of energy in Ontario under your watch. Just today we are hearing about a program in social housing. I would also ask you, what about the other low-income people in this province, who could also benefit from energy conservation programs? We've got to stop hearing about it; we've got to see something.

Minister, you are three years into your mandate and you haven't done anything to seriously address the supply problem in this province. In fact, in your own words, you're backing off some of your supply commitments with regard to the shutting down and replacing of coal in this province because your plan cannot and will not work. It's time to admit that your plan is a failure, because it is no plan at all.

Minister, on December 9, you committed to respond to the OPA report within 60 days. That expired on February 9. You have yet to respond to that report. That is a report that deals directly with the supply issue in this province, and you have not met your commitment to respond to that report in the time you said you would. You're dragging your feet, you're wringing your hands, you're

wishy-washy and you're not answering the call to arms about solving energy problems in this province.

People want to know. They see ever-increasing electricity rates, they see little in conservation and they see little to give them solace on the supply-side issue—just talk, talk, talk. Talk is cheap, Minister. It is time to put the nose to the grindstone, the shoulder to the wheel and get to work on energy in this province. Supply is the issue. Unless you do, we will see the same problems this summer that existed last summer under your watch. It is time for real action in Ontario.

IMMIGRATION WEBSITE

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response? The member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The member for Kitchener–Waterloo is waiting patiently.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener–Waterloo): On behalf of our party, I'm certainly pleased to respond to the announcement made by the minister today with respect to the Ontarioimmigration.ca website, which has been established in partnership with the federal government and that also includes our municipalities in that partnership. Our party welcomes any initiative that is going to assist newcomers to settle and integrate into communities in Ontario, so we welcome this today.

One of the issues I want to address, in a very non-partisan way—I think it's an issue that continues to concern all of us, an issue I've heard about for the 15 years I have been here—is the difficulties foreign-trained professionals still have. As I say, it's a non-partisan issue; it's an issue that I think we all, working together, are trying to resolve.

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There are many people who come here, including those in the medical profession who, as a result of having operated and worked in their own country of origin, want to come here and continue to work as doctors. Unfortunately, we've heard what happens when they make application. They're sometimes told, "Yes, when you go there, you will be able to continue to practise as a doctor" or an engineer or an accountant. Unfortunately, we know that is not the case.

I hope we will continue to work collectively with the federal government in order to ensure that accurate information is given to people in their country of origin so that when they arrive on these shores, just as my family did, they will know exactly what lies ahead. So I would encourage us to work together.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): I'm pleased to respond to the Minister of Energy. Another day in the Ontario Legislature and another attempt by the McGuinty government to convince the people of Ontario that the McGuinty Liberals actually care about energy efficiency and conservation.

Here is the reality. The McGuinty government proposes \$40 billion in new mega-nuclear plants, and what are they prepared to invest now in energy conservation? A grand total of \$169 million. So it's \$40 billion for nuclear and \$169 million for energy efficiency. I think anybody across Ontario would recognize this game for what it is.

This is a report by the Pembina Institute: Power for the Future. It was recently issued, and it is actually a report card on how little the McGuinty government has done with respect to energy efficiency over its first three years. It recommended, for example, that the government of Ontario adopt minimum energy efficiency standards under the Energy Efficiency Act equivalent to the energy efficiency levels required for Energy Star labelling for all major electricity-using devices. This is their report: "Unclear if Ministry of Energy" under the McGuinty government "currently has adequate resources to undertake a major updating project."

Recommendation 2: "The provincial building code should be amended to require R2000, Canadian building improvement program ... or equivalent energy efficiency performance for all new buildings and building renovations by 2010." The reaction? No action to date.

Number 4: "The most energy-efficient technologies in all sectors and end uses should be labelled through the Energy Star program." What's happened under the McGuinty government? No action to date.

The next recommendation: "The government of Ontario should establish a partnership with utilities, financial institutions, energy service companies, municipalities and other stakeholders to offer a series of financing mechanisms to assist electricity consumers in all sectors to finance the adoption of energy efficient products and technologies or other measures that can be financed out of the savings" that will achieve energy efficiency. The report card on the McGuinty government: No action to date.

"The government of Ontario should enter into an agreement with the federal government under the auspices of the federal government's Kyoto Protocol implementation plan to share the costs of providing ... financial incentives for the adoption of energy efficient technologies." One of the things that should be done is sales tax rebates for Energy Star products in all sectors and small-scale renewable energy power sources. What has the McGuinty government done to date? The report card says they removed the sales tax rebate on many of these things.

So, another day where the McGuinty government tries to convince the people of Ontario that they care about energy efficiency and conservation. But when you read from the Pembina Institute's report, nothing could be further from the truth.

IMMIGRATION WEBSITE

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): I just want to say unequivocally that I like the Minister of

Citizenship, and it's with that in mind that I find it regrettable that the statement we're presented with here today has very little substance.

What we are talking about today is a website. What I want to say to the Minister of Citizenship is this: Are you going to include this Liberal promise in your website? This is the Liberal promise of 2003: "We will require that all Ontario trades and professions accelerate the entry of qualified new Canadians. If, after one year, the professional trade has not eliminated barriers to entry, we will act."

We are now close to the end of your third year, and while you have made some progress with doctors—George, George—and while we've made some progress on so many other fronts, including doctors and engineers, because I believe we could do so much more, we've done so little.

As it relates to engineers, we know for example that they insist that any engineer have one year of Canadian work experience before they work in Canada, no matter how much experience they already have. No effort has been made to deal with a profession that keeps foreign-trained, experienced engineers from getting the jobs they require—such a waste of human capital.

What we need is a concrete plan to help, so that those immigrants who come and are fully qualified get jobs. That's what we need, not a website.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): A question to the Premier: You already have a major credibility problem. You have a reputation for cynically making election promises and then, once in office, cynically breaking those promises one by one. And now, on Thursday, a spending spree of a budget that blasts the roof off provincial spending, a record \$6-billion increase in government spending and a budget that not only hid revenue but intentionally chose to run a deficit. Premier, would you agree that with this \$23-billion issue, Ontario's case has been greatly harmed because, quite frankly, we can't trust you with the finances of the province?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Let me say, first of all, how proud I am of the budget we put forward. I'm proud of it not so much because of the work that was put into it by representatives of our government and our devoted public service, but because I believe it reflects the values and priorities of the people of Ontario. The budget invests in the kinds of things Ontarians want us to invest in. We're investing in infrastructure for the first time in a long time in a way that is remarkable. We are investing again in health care and education. Those are the kinds of things Ontarians tell us are their three top priorities. The member opposite has a different perspective, but I would

suggest to him that he is out of step with the fundamental values and priorities of the people of Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: I would say to the Premier, we want to help you make the case with Ottawa, but you are making it awfully difficult. You took in \$3 billion in additional revenue; not only that, you hid it in your pocket by not bringing it forward in the third-quarter statement. You had a deficit that you intentionally ran of \$1.4 billion. Put those together; Premier. You had a \$3-billion increase in revenues at hand in windfall, and you ran a deficit of \$1.4 billion. You could have balanced that budget twice over, but instead went on a massive end-of-year spending spree.

Premier, your behaviour is like somebody who goes out, buys a new suit and shiny new shoes and goes begging with new cap in hand to Ottawa for more money. Premier, you've lost a lot of credibility. Would you admit that your budget has blown a major hole in our case with Ottawa and that we now have to fix your runaway spending spree of a budget?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It is not surprising to have confirmed for us today that the member and the party he represents opposite don't understand the concept of one-time monies. The fact of the matter is that we had a better year than we had anticipated, and not just that, it was better than had been predicted by the private sector. The question then came, what is the best thing to do with those one-time monies?

It's important that the members opposite understand that when it comes to one-time monies, all you can make is a one-time investment. He's suggesting that we should have paid down the budget. I can tell you that the people of Ontario are not going to pay off their mortgage if the foundation is badly in need of repair. What we decided to do with these one-time monies was to make a one-time investment in something that is durable, something that is of lasting value, something that we can look back on generations from now and say, "That was the right thing to do." So we are investing heavily in infrastructure: roads, bridges and a new subway line. That's in keeping with the priorities and values of the people of Ontario.

1430

Mr. Hudak: Here's the problem, Premier: The reality is, nobody believes that line anymore. You've done the same thing each and every year, where you intentionally hide revenue and then, surprise, at the end of the year, you go on a last-minute spending spree. You know very well you did the same thing last year. The Provincial Auditor came after you for that. You went on a drunken sailor of a spending spree. Today you wake up sober at the Empire Club and start trying to make the case with Ottawa. We want to help in the fiscal gap campaign, we want to address that issue, but you're making it awfully hard when you go on end-of-year spending sprees and intentionally—intentionally—run a deficit, when you knew darn well you could balance the books two times over. Premier, will you admit you made a mistake, that you have harmed our case with Ottawa, and act to fix this budget and balance the books this fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I'm convinced that the member opposite's constituents would be very interested in hearing the position he's taking in this regard, because through this budget, for example, in the riding of Erie-Lincoln, we're sending to Fort Erie \$597,000 for roads and bridges; we're sending to Haldimand county \$3.716 million; Lincoln, \$606,000; Niagara, over \$8 million; Port Colborne, close to \$400,000; Wainfleet township, \$265,000; West Lincoln township, \$521,000—for a total of \$14,824,715 for roads and bridges in those communities. Let me say to the people of Erie-Lincoln, this member may not feel that this is important to the people living in that community, but this government believes it's time we invested in those roads and those bridges to improve the quality of life for people living in those communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Hudak: Premier, as you know, on the very same day you brought forward a spending spree of a budget that intentionally runs a deficit when it is not necessary, the province of Quebec came out with a balanced budget. In the province of Ontario our revenues were up \$6 billion from the previous year, and yet you still insist on running a deficit. Every new dollar that came in, you engaged in an end-of-year spending spree. So you tell me, how can they take your case that you presented today at the Empire Club seriously in Ottawa when Quebec balances their books under tougher times, and you had \$6 billion in Ontario and you couldn't balance the books? How can they take you seriously in Ottawa?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): At least the province can take comfort in the fact that we're not hiding a \$5.5-billion deficit the way you did—an absolutely scandalous budget.

As the Premier said, we had one-time money. We made strategic and prudent choices to invest that money in public infrastructure. We're investing it in new subways in the greater Toronto area. We're investing in roads and bridges throughout the province of Ontario. We invested in insulin pumps for young diabetic children and their families. Those investments: \$125 million for agriculture. Your leader yesterday said that we should have done more. Now you're saying, balance the budget and cut taxes. You're all over the board.

This government has a plan. We've eliminated three quarters of the deficit that his government left. We are investing in our health care deficit, our education deficit and our infrastructure deficit—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hudak: I have yet to hear the Premier or his finance minister address the central question about how much damage they have done to our case with Ottawa and to the fiscal gap by this drunken-sailor spending spree of a budget. I pointed out that Quebec, with far less revenue coming in than the gluttonous \$6-billion spending increase of the Dalton McGuinty Liberals, found a

way to balance their books. The finance minister as well as the Premier must know that only two provinces now continue to run a deficit: Prince Edward Island and Ontario. And Prince Edward Island had nowhere near the revenue coming in that Ontario had this past year.

I'll ask the minister again, the finance minister who hid in the third-quarter finances the fact that he had about an additional \$1.8 billion in tax revenue coming in: Will you admit that you hid money you had coming in? And please tell us you're going to make a better case with Ottawa, because you've lost all your credibility on the finances.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: We've absolutely lost no credibility on that argument, for a whole variety of reasons. First of all, I'm pleased to say that the federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Flaherty, whom I've met with, has been most receptive to our arguments. You might remember Mr. Flaherty. We've had quite a good discussion with Mr. Flaherty.

If I may, I would also point out that the government of Ontario has never suggested that the gap is all about transfers between governments. The gap is about what Ontarians pay to Ottawa versus what Ontario gets back from Ottawa. It's much broader than that.

We are going to continue to press the new federal government. We're going to press them on all fronts. The case is strong. It's solid. I'll remind you that he and his party voted to support the case. It hasn't changed one stitch, other than that I must say Mr. Flaherty has been very receptive to our discussions, and I look forward to a continuing positive relationship with Mr. Flaherty as we work through all of these various issues.

Mr. Hudak: Of course we supported that resolution. We believe in the case, obviously. You're making it awfully hard to be taken seriously in Ottawa when every other province save PEI and Ontario have balanced their books. You're making it awfully hard when you rake in some \$6 billion in additional revenue and go on a massive spending spree. You're making the case awfully hard when you intentionally run a deficit when the minister knows full well he could have balanced that budget, and when you see spending like \$2 million in taxpayers' money for new furniture for your LHINs while taxpayers sit in hallways in a hospital just down the road. No wonder they see red when they hear about \$150,000 put into researching the sex lives of squirrels.

Minister, you have done tremendous damage to Ontario's case with Ottawa. Tell me you'll accept our amendment to the bill, that you'll come back and balance the books in 2005-06 like you should have from the beginning.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The case on the gap hasn't been weakened at all, but let me tell you what case has been weakened: the case of the Conservative Party and their opposition to this budget. Here's what Mr. Tory said about balancing the budget: "I think the most important priority you could have dealt with in this budget, easily, based on the amount of money we have, is to balance." Then he said we should cut taxes. Then he said we

should spend more money uploading programs. Then he said we should spend more money on agriculture. Then he said we should have more money for rural Ontario. So he wants to balance the budget, cut taxes, spend more and not explain where any of it's going to come from, and we'll end up with a \$5.5-billion deficit, just like the one you left.

This government has a solid plan, a plan that is eliminating the health care deficit that that party and that government left, a plan that is eliminating the education and skills deficit, the infrastructure deficit and the fiscal deficit. We're on track. It's a balanced, prudent plan that reflects the priorities of the people of this great province.

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AUTISM TREATMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. Why is the McGuinty government still denying IBI treatment to autistic children?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Let me say that in our first budget, we increased welfare rates by 3%. In our budget last week, we delivered another 2% increase. On top of that, we've ended the clawback of increases to the national child benefit. That means \$56 million more for children of parents on social assistance. Combined, a single parent of two on social assistance will see an increase of \$1,620 more this year than they would have in 2003. That's a 15.7% increase. We are pleased about the progress that we have made, but obviously there's always still more to be done.

Mr. Hampton: My question is, why is the McGuinty government still not funding IBI treatment for autistic children? You see, before the election, Premier, you sent letters and e-mails to desperate parents of autistic children and you said, "I believe that the lack of government-funded IBI treatment for autistic children over six is unfair and discriminatory."

Today, under the McGuinty government, hundreds of autistic children are on a waiting list for IBI treatment. They are not getting IBI treatment. We know, Premier, that your government had \$3 billion in surplus revenues last year, yet these children are still waiting for IBI treatment. Why haven't you kept your promise, Premier? Why aren't these children receiving IBI treatment instead of languishing on waiting lists?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Education.

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): With regard to the question opposite, we are providing, through the co-operation of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education, whatever is the best treatment now for children with autism. The age limit has been lifted in terms of the eligibility for services, and we are now working within education in particular, collaboratively with people especially hired for the task, to be able to provide the principles of ABA and IBI within the school system and without, so that there is continuity between the treatment that children receive before school, at home and during the school day.

We have provided school boards with a net new needs basis for funding so that any special services that they provide in their context, in the school day, are funded. We've provided approximately \$40 million for that obligation. It applies equally to children of all different special needs, but it includes the proportion who have autism. We're busy working with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to improve on those services to make sure they're appropriate, and those services are continuing to be expanded as needed.

Mr. Hampton: I'm not surprised the Premier shuffled off the question, because this is about the Premier's credibility gap: promising desperate parents and their autistic children that they will receive IBI treatment, and then it doesn't happen.

As for the Minister of Education, Minister, next to zero is happening in the school system. The only reason that some children are receiving treatment is because the court ordered you to do it, something which the McGuinty government then appealed against. You're not providing IBI treatment for children in schools, and you're not providing IBI treatment for other children not in school. There are children languishing on the waiting list while you fight tooth and nail against the very promise the Premier made.

I say to the Premier again: This was your promise to desperate parents, to vulnerable kids. You've got the \$3-billion budget surplus. Why are autistic children languishing on waiting lists while you deny them IBI treatment?

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: I just want to say that it may serve the member opposite's political purposes to pretend that nothing has been done, but far from it. We have increased spending for children with special needs by 65% in the school system, equally available to those families with autism. Now, if he wants to infer and provide information that isn't correct, that's his ethical choice to do so, but my colleague has hired 110 additional therapists. There's a 43% increase in children getting IBI treatment. That's just in the new system that's been created.

We would be happy if the member opposite was genuinely interested in the welfare of these children and genuinely wanted to sit down and look at the way that things have been reformed in the school system and to find out what's really happened. But I think we've seen a propensity on the part of the third party to raise this issue only when it's in their political purposes to make another point. Well, there's one point to be made: These children deserve respect—better respect than they're getting in the kind of questions and the kind of information being used by the member opposite.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is to the Premier. The Premier should know there is next to no IBI treatment going on in schools under the McGuinty government.

I want to remind you of what happened last fall at Kashechewan First Nation: Children covered in sores, swollen stomachs, airlifted from their homes because of tainted water. Regrettably, that story could have happened on many other First Nations across Ontario. My question is this: Just months after the disaster at Kashechewan, how do you justify cutting the aboriginal affairs budget by 57%, from \$49 million to \$21 million, when you have a budget surplus?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the minister.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I would ask the member to look at the estimates, and to look at that line by line. What you will find, especially in the ministry of aboriginal affairs, is that, year over year, we have different land claim settlements that amount to millions of dollars. Some years, there is a lot there; in others, there is not. The amounts vary from year to year. So we have a base budget that remains the same as it was last year, but also we go in-year and require more dollars to settle land claims, and we do that every year, depending on the need.

Mr. Hampton: Again to the Premier, you once called the Kashechewan tainted water crisis an embarrassment. Let me tell you what's really embarrassing: tainted water on so many First Nations; so many children living in poverty on First Nations. You yourself referred to 10,000 aboriginal children living in impoverished conditions within the geographic boundaries of Toronto. Under those circumstances, the McGuinty government slashes the budget of the ministry responsible for aboriginal affairs by 57%. Premier, you may argue that this is a land claim somewhere. I think what's really going on here is that your government has lots to say about aboriginal issues, but when it comes to doing anything, you're not. In fact, you're headed in the wrong direction. You tell me, how do you justify those kinds of cuts to the ministry responsible for aboriginal affairs when you yourself say these situations are embarrassing in terms of the tainted water and aboriginal children living in poverty?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I think we need unanimous consent to get some more research money over there to the third party, because they need to take a look at the books. They need to take a look at the estimates and understand what's going on. I think the member needs to know—and I'm sure he does appreciate—the role that the Ontario government plays in regard to aboriginal issues in this province. Basically, it deals with land claims. We also have assistance with health through the Minister of Health. As he knows, it's the federal government that deals with all the infrastructure on reserves, on First Nations, and that includes water. He knows that. Again, I would say to the member, he needs to look at it line by line and understand that during the year we go to our contingency fund to settle land claims, and sometimes these come into the millions of dollars. It has nothing to do with the base funding of our ministry.

Mr. Hampton: The McGuinty government says it's nothing to do with the base funding of that ministry.

Well, I beg to tell the minister, when you go out and talk to First Nations, it has everything to do with the base funding of that ministry.

I want to get back to the Premier's credibility gap. The Premier said that he was going to help autistic children; it hasn't happened. The Premier said that First Nations children were a priority; they got a budget cut. The Premier said that he was going to end the clawback of the national child benefit supplement, that he was going to stop taking \$1,500 out of the pockets of the poorest kids. None of those things has happened under your government—all while you have a \$3-billion budget windfall. Premier, those were your promises. It's your credibility. How do you justify cutting, how do you justify denying, how do you justify continuing the clawback when you have a \$3-billion budget surplus—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: I've never been as proud of Premier McGuinty, the Premier of this province of Ontario, as on that Tuesday afternoon in October when, in meeting with the chiefs from the James Bay coast, he said, "Do you know what? We've got to get those people out of that community for their health and for their safety." He did that, and I'm very proud of that decision.

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GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): My question is for the Premier. Premier, you may recall that several months ago we raised with you the very lucrative advertising contracts being awarded to the Liberal agency that created the "I won't raise your taxes" ad, the biggest deception in Ontario electoral history. We now find that our concerns have been ignored and the Bensimon Byrne agency has been rewarded with a 63% increase in its retainer at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. Premier, will you explain to the hard-pressed taxpayers of Ontario just why you are using their money to enrich spin doctors who helped you undertake the biggest and most expensive deception in Ontario electoral history? Why are you engaging in this blatant act of patronage?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Government Services.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): As soon as we came into government, one of the things that we did was to begin work on a process that would make certain that when advertising agencies were selected, they went through a fair process of selection. In the case of the advertising agency, there's a three-person panel with no politicians on it—it's civil servants who go through it—and they get three firms in, they review the three firms and select the one that is best qualified to do it, with no involvement by any of the political people at all. We have put in place a process.

I think the public should be confident that we make sure that their money is well looked after and that the

best possible company is selected. In this particular case, this particular company has been engaged by the province of Ontario for I think at least four or five years, going back to a previous government. It's a well-regarded organization selected by three civil servants merely on the basis of who can best do this job.

Mr. Runciman: The fair process is clearly a Liberal litmus test. This same firm, Bensimon Byrne, had their wallets lined to the tune of 6.3 million tax dollars the year after the provincial election—a 6,000% increase over their previous billing. Now we hear they're getting another increase of 63% from what is now apparently a Liberal milk cow and haven for Liberal hacks, the lottery corporation. All of this is a reward for creating the most deceptive ad in Ontario electoral history.

Minister, will you undertake to table a detailed report outlining the increased lottery corporation initiatives that were used to justify what appears to be just another juicy payoff to a Liberal friend and the competitive process used to select the firm? Will you do that?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I'll just say to the public that what they heard there is an accusation against a company—they should be aware that this organization was selected by the previous government. They were the agency selected to do the work at the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corp. None of that language talking about that organization came out of the government of the day.

I would just say to the public that this is a well-respected company. The previous government had already selected them to do work. It is a well-regarded organization selected by a fair process of bureaucrats, civil servants, going through a well-documented process.

You do the business community a disservice when you make those kinds of accusations, particularly against a company that the previous government, your government, hired for this specific organization. I think we must be somewhat cautious with these broad-brush accusations against a well-regarded company and the selection done by a fair, unbiased process to make sure that taxpayer money is well-regarded.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Today, Ontario's property owners heard from the Ombudsman that MPAC is badly dysfunctional, that its assessments are not credible and, in some cases, the assessments were actually illegal. Mr. Marin directs two key recommendations to your government, but, despite having had two and a half years to clean up the property tax mess, you say on both key questions that you need more time to consult.

Minister, many thousands of property tax owners found out today that their assessments may be very wrong and, in some cases, may be illegal. They have exactly 36 hours in which to appeal. By the time they get the newspaper tomorrow and read about this, they will have 24 hours. What I'm asking you is, will you commit to extending the deadline for at least 30 more days so that

property owners can launch their appeals with adequate preparation time?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The Premier and I met this morning, and under his direction I have drafted legislation, which I will introduce tomorrow, to extend the deadline for 90 days. I hope that both opposition parties will support its passage in one day.

Mr. Prue: I would like to start by thanking the minister, because this is the first positive aspect around this entire—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Stop the clock. I am unable to hear the member from Beaches—East York. I need to be able to hear the member.

The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Prue: You know that part of the problem, and the reason so many people are upset about their property tax assessment, is that from that assessment this province derives many billions of dollars because of the down-loading. So the second part of what we want to know: The provincially mandated programs must be uploaded back to the province, and market value assessment—the whole thing—needs a sober second look as to whether or not this is the proper avenue from which to get this money.

That is my question: Will the Premier also commit to uploading those monies, as well as the 90 days, so that property tax assessment in Ontario can be fair to all businesses and property owners?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I guess the member just can't take "yes" for an answer.

We indicated that we were looking forward to receiving the Ombudsman's report. I was delighted to receive it today. Seventeen of the 22 recommendations have already been acted on by MPAC. There are three that MPAC is going to consult on, moving forward. There are two that relate specifically to the province that both involve legislative change. We take his recommendations very seriously and we're going to begin to consult with the stakeholders with respect to how to implement them.

Let me say this: This government is prepared to work with the Ombudsman—with many others—to make sure that we get this thing right. But we're going to do it appropriately, and we're going to do it with a little more foresight and wisdom than we saw from either the NDP or the Conservative government on this file.

I look forward to the NDP's support of the bill that I will introduce tomorrow to extend that, not just to 30 days but to 90 days. We will continue to consult stakeholders as we look at legislative reform resulting from the Ombudsman's report.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

RENOUVEAU DÉMOCRATIQUE

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering—Ajax—Uxbridge): My question today is for the minister responsible for

democratic renewal. Yesterday you announced the beginning of what I believe to be an important undertaking, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, which is scheduled to begin meeting in the fall and to report back to Ontarians in May next year. I was honoured to sit on the select committee last summer and fall. This committee report helped to inform this process, and I know it will be of value to the assembly.

I believe that this kind of citizen engagement and consultation is unprecedented in the province of Ontario, and I'm sure that my constituents are interested in finding out more about it. Can you explain exactly what the citizens' assembly is planning to undertake and how this process will unfold?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): That's an excellent question, and I'm happy to address it. Yes, this House and I are incredibly grateful for the work of the select committee. Their report will be a valuable resource for the citizens' assembly.

You're quite right to say that this assembly process is a groundbreaking one for our province: This is the most extensive citizen engagement initiative ever undertaken in Ontario.

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Pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'Ontario, les Ontariens et Ontariennes auront la possibilité de participer à une discussion pleine et ouverte sur notre système électoral.

The citizens' assembly will, for the first time in Ontario's history, give Ontarians the opportunity to participate in a full, open debate on our electoral system. The issue for the assembly is which electoral system it thinks would best serve our province: the current first-past-the-post system or an alternative. If the citizens' assembly recommends that we exchange our system for another, that recommendation will be put to the people of Ontario in a binding referendum at some time on or before the end of our government's current mandate. Never before have Ontarians been given such a meaningful voice in shaping our democracy, and I'm proud to announce this process.

Mr. Arthurs: Thank you, Minister. I believe this will certainly be a rather exciting and interesting process. I'm sure that many of my constituents will undertake to get involved.

Who will be chosen to be members of the citizens' assembly, how will they be chosen, and what can people do if they want to engage in this process?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: The assembly will be made up of 103 citizens—one from each of Ontario's ridings. There will be 52 female members and 51 male members, and at least one of the members of the assembly will be of aboriginal ancestry. Members will be randomly selected from the voters' lists, so I encourage all MPPs to encourage their constituents to ensure they are eligible to participate in this memorable opportunity and are on the voters' list by contacting Elections Ontario by April 10. The selection process run by Elections Ontario will begin shortly after April 10.

We also announced yesterday that the assembly will be chaired by Mr. George Thomson. He's a respected and experienced former judge, teacher and deputy minister at both the federal and provincial levels of government. I'm very excited that someone who brings such a lifetime of public service has decided to be the leader in this process.

Les 103 membres de l'Assemblée recommanderont si nous devrions maintenir notre système électoral actuel ou qui nous devrions adopter un autre. Mais sous la direction de M. Thomson, tous les Ontariens et Ontariennes partout dans la province auront la possibilité de prendre part à cette initiative.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): To the Minister of Finance: You've brought down a budget designed to buy votes in this week's by-elections. In fact, you were at the Whitby–Ajax by-election this morning, trying to peddle your budget for a few votes. But you've just cut the agriculture budget by 21%. Minister of Finance, how did you explain your 21% agriculture cut to the farmers you were speaking to this morning at the Whitby Curling Club?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): To the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): It is absolutely unacceptable that a member on that side of the House would try to present such inaccuracies. And I'm being polite.

However, I would invite the honourable member to review the budgets of 2001, 2002 and 2003. You will see that the former government budgeted precisely zero dollars for a contingency for the agriculture budget. Using your methodology, that would suggest that your government cut agriculture funding every year you were in office.

It is irresponsible that you are perpetrating that. Our base budget has increased because our government continues to be committed to the agriculture industry in this province.

Mr. Barrett: Minister of Finance, you were with the farmers this morning. You did cut the ag budget 21%. As well, Minister—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order.

Mr. Barrett: Minister of Finance, you were with cash crop farmers this morning at the Whitby Curling Club. You've reduced their particular amount of support by 52%. You told the farmers this morning to go to Ottawa. However, over 30 million federal dollars have already been delivered to 11,000 Ontario cash crop farmers. Your government waited an extra month before announcing a package that was 52%, and it still has not been delivered. Your government has turned your back on those corn and soybean farmers that you were speaking with this morning. Minister of Finance, this morning those farmers wanted answers from you. They asked you for financial

support. They are looking for an answer, and I think they're looking for an apology from you for the neglect and the insult that I saw this morning in Whitby.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Back to the Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I first of all think that it is very important—it's unfortunate, because of the rhetoric that's being used over there, that we tend to lose sight of the fact that there is a crisis in agriculture, particularly in grains and oilseeds and fruits and vegetable growers.

I would also like to recognize that we have a farmer in the members' gallery today, a guest of the Liberal government, Mr. Stephen Webster.

Our government has recognized the plight of farmers. That is why, two weeks before the budget, we announced, as we were requested to do by the farmers who came to meet with the Premier at the Premier's summit—they wanted a down payment, they wanted a show of good faith, and so we invested \$125 million: \$80 million for grains and oilseeds and \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers.

We continue to be committed to work with the federal government on a multi-year partnership. Will you get on your high horse now, get to Ottawa and demand from your federal cousins that—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. Many Ontarians are very angry that your budget does nothing to stop the creeping privatization of Ontario's hospital system. They know that your private hospital scheme will result in construction costs that may be 30% or 40% higher than they would be if it was done in the public way. That's because private sector borrowing costs are typically much higher. I have a very simple question: Do you have any study that examines the costs of private hospitals to the public treasury, and if you do, will you release it to this Legislature?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Health.

Hon. George Smitherman (Minister of Health and Long-Term Care): I'm very proud of the opportunity to respond to the honourable member's question, because it does give us a chance to repeat something that's very important to Ontarians. I've had the privilege of attending many of the events, some of which were around hospitals that are funded and financed in a traditional fashion and in other fashions. But what I've recognized in all of them is the celebration that occurs in the local community as they come to understand that this government is addressing the challenges of addressing hospital construction in such a fashion that, under our life, under our initiative and five-year plan, we will have invested more in hospital construction in the province of Ontario than the last four governments of Ontario combined.

As I've had the opportunity to speak about before, the member was with me just the other day at Toronto East

General, in his very riding, where we're making a long-needed capital investment to enhance the cancer capacities and the emergency room capacities in that very hospital; just one of a variety of signature projects across this province that are dramatically renewing the hospital infrastructure—long overdue.

Mr. Prue: My question was, do you have any studies that show the amount of money that's going to cost in excess or that's going to be saved? That's what we want to see, a scientific study, because we on this side of the House have a study by an independent economist that verifies that the Brampton private hospital alone would cost \$175 million more than if it was built as a public hospital. That translates into billions of dollars if you multiply that by the 20 or so hospitals you plan to build.

The tragedy is that these new hospitals, schools and transit facilities all over the province won't get built because the money that would be going to vital community projects is ending up going to Bay Street private-sector deal makers. My question to you is, can you tell me why you are going this private route? Why are you shovelling money out to Bay Street at the expense of Main Street projects?

Hon. Mr. Smitherman: The real tragedy is that under that party's life in government, they built no hospital infrastructure in Ontario. Hardly a piece of cement was poured, hardly a brick was laid under their time in office, and the honourable member dares to ask that question. Go to the community of Brampton and talk to the people of Brampton, or to their members in here, and ask them about the pride they're celebrating as this enormous, impressive new hospital comes to life. Just a short time ago, six construction cranes were on site in Brampton, and now the building has been enclosed. It's hardly more than a year away from providing long-needed services to the people of that community.

I lived in Brampton and I used to ride my trail bike on the site that, 30 years ago, was designated as the new hospital site. I'm awfully proud, alongside these members from Brampton, to be part of the government that has, at long last, delivered a much-needed hospital to that community, which is one of the fastest-growing communities all across the country. People will celebrate pride in their local hospital, and for the honourable member to seek to diminish this for his partisan games—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

1510

HIGHWAY 410

Mr. Kuldip Kular (Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. My constituents in Brampton were delighted to hear about the announcement regarding the Highway 410 extension. Can you please explain to us what the announcement entails and what this means for the residents and commuters in our great city of Brampton?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): Highway 410 is an important economic link in

the region of Peel. This area is fast expanding. What this announcement really means is that we will be expanding nine kilometres of stretch from Bovaird Drive in Brampton to Highway 10 in Caledon. For the second phase, we have already called for tenders, and we will be starting construction in the summer of this year. Hopefully, we'll finish sometime next year. We have already spent about \$40 million on this project, and we will be spending another \$110 million to really improve Highway 410. It will help us relieve congestion in this area. What it really means is that it will make the quality of life better for the people of Brampton, and also will relieve congestion.

Mr. Kular: My constituents were also happy to learn that Brampton will benefit from a \$95-million investment allowing them to build an AcceleRide project. Can you tell us, Minister, why this project is a priority and what the people of Brampton can expect to see from this good-news announcement?

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I want to thank the member for his support of this project as well. This is a \$95-million project that will improve public transit in the city of Brampton. Brampton, as most of the members in this House know, is a fast-growing community, and this is an incredible opportunity for us to assist the people with their public transit needs. This AcceleRide project will actually connect Brampton to Mississauga through public transit, and will also connect with York. It will make the connections easier to serve the people of that region much better. Again, this is a measure we have taken to assist the municipalities with their public transit needs so that congestion issues can be addressed and people can commute from one place to another quickly, effectively and in a reliable manner. It will help us reduce congestion as well.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): My question is for the Premier. You promised to investigate and solve the problems with the property assessment system in this province. After doing nothing for months, you announced that it was unnecessary and that there was no need to investigate it. You dismissed the need for a report at all. Today the Ombudsman has released his report, and only as a result of that are you now being pressed into action. We appreciate the deadline extension on the appeals; however, not if it's only used to delay action on this issue. Premier, will you commit that, during the appeal period, you will bring forth action on this file for the people of the province, such as was recommended by my colleague from Erie–Lincoln—the capping of assessments and that kind of thing—so that long-term property tax relief can be felt by the people of Ontario, who are already under a tremendous burden as a result of your government?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The reason that Ontario property owners are under some kind of a heavy burden

is because of a system that was foisted upon them by the previous Conservative government, somewhat akin to a tire with seven separate patches on it.

We are pleased to have received the Ombudsman's report. I can tell you that in our constituency offices throughout the province—and I'm sure I speak for every member of this provincial Parliament—we have heard from constituents who are very concerned about what has been foisted upon them by way of a property tax system. The minister has spoken today about the relief that will be granted immediately, assuming we get all-party support, to extend the deadline for appeals. Beyond that, we have received a number of recommendations: Twenty were directed to MPAC and their operations and two deal specifically with the government. We will carefully consider those that have been brought to our attention, as I know that MPAC and municipalities will carefully consider those that have been brought to their attention as well.

Mr. Yakabuski: Careful consideration is one thing, but action is quite another thing. Mr. Premier, that's what we do as legislators here: We update statutes and bring laws in to recognize the needs of the time. Changing circumstances require that we update legislation. You're on record as saying that this legislation didn't need to be changed. Under pressure, you said, "Well, it's a municipal issue. It's their problem; it's not ours." But now, as a result of the Ombudsman's report, he is saying it is our problem; it is the problem of this government and this Legislature. We need a commitment today that action will be taken so that property owners in this province, who are under tremendous pressure as a result of the other responsibilities placed on them by your government, will not continue to see skyrocketing property assessment escalations in this province. Will you commit to that today, Premier?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Well, this is all a little surreal. What the member opposite is doing is complaining that we're not moving quickly enough to clean up their mess. That's what they're saying. We understand. We accept that they created a mess. There is no question about that.

We very much looked forward to the Ombudsman's report. We now have it in our hands. We look forward to carefully considering it. I think it's important to recognize, as a symbol of how quickly we are prepared to deal with these issues, that the Minister of Finance is going to introduce a bill tomorrow and, with the consent of all parties, we'll be able to delay the period during which appeals can be submitted.

So again, we will work as quickly as we can and do as much as we can to clean up the mess that we inherited.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): My question is for the Minister of Children and Youth Services. I'm asking this question on behalf of the 443,000 children living below the poverty line in the province of Ontario.

They want to know why the McGuinty government continues to claw back the federal allowance that's supposed to be going to them. Dalton McGuinty promised to end the clawback. He said, "The clawback is wrong and we will end it." As children's minister, why haven't you represented children properly by insisting that your Premier keep his promise and end the clawback from Ontario's poorest children? Minister, what are you waiting for?

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): I'd like to refer this to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The Minister of Children and Youth Services has done an outstanding job of representing the interests of poor children in this province.

First of all, this government raised general welfare rates twice now. That's a first step, and that benefits children in social services. Second of all, we have in fact flowed through the clawback for the years we've been in office—2003, 2004, 2005, 2006—and in this budget we've made that permanent. That is an important step forward, and one that this minister fought very hard and very actively for. We restored the nutrition allowance to mothers in social services. We have allowed social service recipients moving off of welfare to extend their health benefits and take them with them as they move back to employment.

We acknowledge that there is much to do. There will always be more we can do. This government will not rest as long as one child goes to bed hungry in this province.

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Ms. Horwath: The bottom line is that Dalton McGuinty promised to end the clawback of the national child benefit and has not yet done it. The federal government sends \$1,450 a year to every poor child and their family. You take that money away from those children and families. I don't know how you can rest with that on your mind. The social action committee of the Ontario Association of Social Workers in Hamilton and district sends you this message: "Hands off." I'm sending it over to the minister by way of this page, Mercedes. Thank you. The postcards are right there and they go to the minister.

You continue to rob those who are least able to fend for themselves, to find food and all of their necessities. Minister, once and for all, when are you going to stop the clawback like your Premier promised?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government's initiatives will mean a difference, for a single-parent-led family with two children, of 15.7% over two years. We acknowledge there's more to do. We remain committed to addressing the gap that exists between people in this province, and I don't think there's a better group of people in this House prepared to do that.

Let me remind you of what you did, before you get too sanctimonious. Here's what you did: You increased taxes on low-income Ontarians. That's what you did. You

raised gas taxes 30% under your watch. Shame on you for that. You provided over a doubling of welfare rolls; twice as many children were on welfare when you left office as were on welfare when you came to office.

We have begun to address the challenge of flowing back the national child benefit. We've made permanent the incremental changes that have happened on our watch. We acknowledge there is more to do, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you that unlike the sanctimony you hear over there, this government is committed to working with the poor and the vulnerable in this society to ensure they share in the great opportunity that all of us have come to share in.

ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): My question today is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. My constituents were delighted to learn that our 2006 budget includes \$25 million for the redevelopment of the animal health laboratory at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph. It's great news. It's there to increase our capacity to research diseases like avian flu. Veterinary College Dean Elizabeth Stone says, "An improved ability to diagnose infectious diseases will have a great impact on the Canadian agriculture industry." Minister, could you explain how the government's investment of \$25 million for the animal health lab came to be, and how it is going to assist the farmers of Ontario?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I very much appreciate the question, and I appreciate the strong advocacy of the member on behalf of her constituents, but also on behalf of the good work that's done at the University of Guelph. I think it's important to point out that for the last two years the Premier of Ontario has hosted the agri-food summit. At the summit we collect the representative voices from a wide range of folks in the agri-food industry. They have identified why it is so very important that, in Ontario, we have a state-of-the-art facility to deal with animal health. We know there are issues around the world of an international nature, and the member identified avian flu as only one. They have identified, for our government, why it is important that we are proactive, why we make investments in research so that the industry is better prepared to respond should these events happen in our own province and in our own country. I'm very pleased that, by listening to participants in the industry, through the leadership of our Premier, we have seen fit to make the \$25-million announcement that I think is very important.

Mrs. Sandals: As University of Guelph President Alastair Summerlee said, "The new laboratory facilities will be a key component of the strategic plan to place the Ontario Veterinary College at the forefront of improving the health of animals, people and the environment." I agree, and the people of Guelph–Wellington agree that this is a valuable infrastructure investment and that the

health and welfare of our province depend on investments such as this one. Minister, could you elaborate on why such investments are important, not only for the farmers of this province but for all of Ontario?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Again, I think there probably isn't anything more important to all of us in this room and to all of our constituents than the food we eat every day. We believe, as a government, that it's more than great value; it's absolutely imperative that we make investments in the area of research and innovation to ensure that we continue to have the best and the safest-quality food in Ontario.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that, over the next five years, our government—our Premier—is prepared to invest \$2.5 million to support those farmers and producers who are prepared to make these kinds of investments to ensure that the food products we eat and the practices on-farm are safe, that we're on the cutting edge. Our Premier has seen fit to establish an award each year to recognize these great people, these forward-thinkers who are making investments—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

TOURISM

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): My question is for the Premier, and it concerns Ontario's tourism industry.

Today, I had the opportunity of attending and participating in the Tourism Federation of Ontario's annual forum. Last Thursday's budget did not do enough for our tourism industry. The tourism industry was asking for approximately \$30 million to be put towards the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corp. Our tourist industry is facing extraordinary challenges this year because of the high Canadian dollar and of course the pending US border passport issue.

I would ask the Premier, why was the budget not more helpful to Ontario's tourism industry?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The honourable member opposite will surely understand that I'm about to disagree with him on this particular matter.

The single biggest community that stands as a draw for tourism in Ontario is the province's capital city, the city of Toronto. This city is in the midst of a cultural renaissance. That is coming about in part because our government is partnering with the community. In this budget, we've contributed \$49 million to support capital construction projects for Ontario's major cultural agencies and attractions. I'm talking about the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Canadian Opera House, the National Ballet School, the Royal Conservatory of Music and the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art.

If there's any large, urban centre in North America that is doing as much as we are in this particular city to ensure that we all benefit from a growing cultural renaissance, I am not aware of it. We are putting Toronto on the map when it come to culture in North America.

PETITIONS

SPECIAL CARE HOMES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hundreds of vulnerable adults live in homes for special care that provide them a warm and secure, stable and friendly environment which allows them to lead fulfilling lives; and

"Whereas the alternative for many of these individuals is a life of homelessness on the street; and

"Whereas special care homes have had only a single 3% increase since 1999, which in no way matches the rising costs they face; and

"Whereas the Liberal government promised Ontario in the election they would 'significantly increase supportive housing options for those suffering from mental illness';

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the government to bring in an immediate increase in funding to homes for special care."

As I am in complete agreement, I affix my signature.

1530

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Bruce Crozier (Essex): I have a petition signed by friends of the Royal Oak nursing home in Kingsville that reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care homes, need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

"Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I present this petition to the Legislature.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it is signed by a great number of my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I affix my signature, as I agree with this petition.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly by a number of individuals from Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services in Mississauga. It reads as follows:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers working with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

I'm pleased to join with the petitioners in signing this petition and in asking page Meghan to carry it for me.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition that comes from Lakeland Long Term Care in Parry Sound, and it says:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care homes, need; with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

“Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

“Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007).”

I affix my signature in support of this petition.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craiton (Niagara Falls): I’m pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, and it reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the government of Ontario’s health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration,” known as wet, “and there are other forms of macular degeneration,” known as dry, “that are not covered,

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for most constituents and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program.”

I’m pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

SERVICES FOR THE
DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas, without appropriate support, people who have an intellectual disability are often unable to participate effectively in community life and are deprived of the benefits of society enjoyed by other citizens; and

“Whereas quality supports are dependent on the ability to attract and retain qualified workers; and

“Whereas the salaries of workers who provide community-based supports and services are up to 25% less than salaries paid to those doing the same work in government-operated services and other sectors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to address, as a priority, funding to community agencies in the developmental services sector to address critical underfunding of staff salaries and ensure that people who have an intellectual disability continue to receive quality supports and services that they require in order to live meaningful lives within their community.”

This is signed by staff, families and clients from Community Living Burlington, and it has my signature of support.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas the spending on most social services has been frozen since the early 1990s under both the Rae and Harris governments; and

“Whereas the population of the region of Peel has approximately tripled in that time period ...; and

“Whereas demand for services has exploded as a result of population and other social changes;

“It is now noted that the people of the region of Peel receive 50% less funding on a per capita basis than the average provincial per capita funding for social programs....

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services correct this imbalance in their new programs and through the reform of the funding formulae for its old programs within a three-year time frame;

“That the Ministry of Children and Youth Services continue to correct this imbalance in their new programs and introduce fundamental reform of their funding policies to correct this imbalance within the next three years as well.”

I submit this petition and I’m happy to sign it.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I’m very pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario which reads as follows:

“Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care

homes, need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

"Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I support the petition and affix my signature.

1540

SPRING BEAR HUNT

Ms. Monique M. Smith (Nipissing): I have a petition to the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources' own data shows a clear and undeniable connection between the termination of the spring bear hunt and the increase in nuisance bears; and

"Whereas there has been an increase of almost 500% in the number of calls to the Ministry of Natural Resources about nuisance bears but no change in calls in Manitoba, where the spring hunt continues; and

"Whereas at least five people have been attacked by bears in 2005, and since 1998, bears have killed seven people in Ontario, six in provincial parks where hunting is not allowed, and all fatalities have occurred where there is little or no hunting pressure; and

"Whereas adult male bears are cannibals and highly aggressive; there are thousands more adult male bears in the population since the hunt was terminated and thousands more bear cubs are being orphaned or killed; unprecedented numbers of nuisance bears are being trapped, relocated or killed, but the problem persists; and

"Whereas the increase of nuisance bears since the spring bear hunt was cancelled has become a serious threat to public safety, and increasing interaction with humans from higher bear densities is likely to result in more bear attacks on humans; and

"Whereas, during a debate in the Legislative Assembly on November 17, 2005, members of all three official parties supported a return of the spring bear hunt;

"Therefore, be it resolved that we petition the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Natural Resources to, in the interests of public safety and scientific wildlife management, immediately return a spring bear hunt to Ontario."

This is signed by over 150 constituents in the north.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): "Whereas the Minister of Culture recently announced that there would be funding cuts totalling more than \$1.2 million from Ontario public library services; and

"Whereas over 69 million people visited public libraries in Ontario in 2003, with more than 100 million items circulating; and

"Whereas these cuts will impact us as library users, resulting in delays in how libraries receive new books;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to direct the Minister of Culture to restore the funding for Ontario public library services so that libraries can continue to promote literacy in our communities."

As I am in agreement, I've affixed my signature and I give this to Trevor.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn (Oakville): I have a petition here in support of community mediation which reads:

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

ROYAL ASSENT

SANCTION ROYALE

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that, in the name of Her Majesty the Queen, his Honour the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to assent to certain bills in his office.

The Deputy Clerk (Ms. Deborah Deller): The following are the titles of the bills to which His Honour did assent:

Bill 21, An Act to enact the Energy Conservation Leadership Act, 2006 and to amend the Electricity Act, 1998, the Ontario Energy Board Act, 1998, and the Conservation Authorities Act / *Projet de loi 21, Loi édictant la Loi de 2006 sur le leadership en matière de conservation de l'énergie et apportant des modifications à la Loi de 1998 sur l'électricité, à la Loi de 1998 sur la Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario et à la Loi sur les offices de protection de la nature.*

Bill 36, An Act to provide for the integration of the local system for the delivery of health services / *Projet de loi 36, Loi prévoyant l'intégration du système local de prestation des services de santé.*

Bill 210, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act and make complementary amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 210, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications complémentaires à d'autres lois.*

ORDERS OF THE DAY

2006 ONTARIO BUDGET

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 27, 2006, on the amendment to the motion that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Further debate?

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): I look forward to this day. I always look forward to responding to McGuinty government budgets, because it's where we get to see how many promises they didn't keep this year. So, once again, much of what I have to say will deal with broken promises—promises that were made by the McGuinty government oh so solemnly, with such sanctimony; and now, a couple of years after they were made, we see those very promises going up in smoke.

The first promise I want to deal with is the promise made by Dalton McGuinty that the McGuinty government would do away with any move towards the privatization of hospitals in any way. You'll remember that Dalton McGuinty used to be very critical of the former Conservative government when they put forward the concept of private financing of hospitals. In fact, I think I can quote the now Premier. He said that he was opposed to private financing concepts of hospitals because private financing would cost the public more, that Ministry of Health funding would be diverted from patients to corporate profits, and that this was leading us down the road to creeping privatization, creeping Americanization of our health care system. He vowed at the time that he would put an end to any private financing of hospitals and any concepts of private financing of hospitals.

But what do we see in this budget, attached to this budget? The Dalton McGuinty who promised to stop private hospitals, private financing initiatives of hospitals, because they cost more and deliver less, has announced in this budget plans to increase the number of private financing hospitals in Ontario by 1,200%. The number of private hospitals, private financings of hospitals, will go from two that were going to be established under the Conservatives to 25 under the McGuinty government. This budget announces that 11 requests for proposals will be released over the next year, and other communities won't be seeing new hospitals for a very long time thanks to the slow pace of the private financing process.

I just want to again inform people at home of just how this private financing works. An economic analysis of the Brampton private financing hospital concept shows that it will end up costing the health budget \$175 million more for a private financing hospital than a publicly financed hospital. Why? Because the private corporation that is going to do the private financing scheme wants at least a 15% profit—20%, if they can get it. So that will add to the cost. That will be money diverted away from patient care towards corporate profits. But in addition, the private financing entity will have to pay interest rates of 8% or 9% when the government could get an interest rate of 5% itself. To give people at home an example of what a bad idea this is, if you bought a new home and you were going to take out a \$200,000 mortgage, and the credit union would give you personally a 5% interest rate, why would you go to a Bay Street private financing corporation and have them borrow the money at 8%? On \$200,000 borrowed, the difference between a 5% interest rate that you could get yourself and an 8% interest rate that the Bay Street corporation would give you, that amount of money borrowed over 20 years would mean literally tens of thousands of dollars of extra interest you'd have to pay. Then you'd have to pay them 20% for their profit figure on top of that. I think any person would say that's a bad deal.

1550

But that's exactly what the McGuinty government is doing now with our hospital system: moving to private financing corporations on Bay Street that are going to charge 8% and 9% interest, and as a result hundreds of millions of dollars of the health budget that should be going to pay for patient care instead are going to be diverted into corporate profits by the McGuinty government. This from a government that said it was going to protect and sustain medicare; this from a government that said it was opposed to any privatization of the hospital system, any Americanization of the hospital system. Yet that's exactly what we see.

The other example of this broken promise in the budget is how this budget relates to the government's local health initiatives network. There's nothing local about them. This is about the Minister of Health literally telling local hospitals what they can spend, what they can spend it on, what services they can provide and what

services they can't provide. And it's about the Minister of Health telling hospitals that they must privatize health services.

In fact, I was just speaking to my colleague Mr. Runciman, who was telling me that the Minister of Health has informed the hospital in his hometown of Brockville that they must take a number of services currently being offered within the hospital and turn them over to private corporations. So for things like food services, housekeeping, maintenance, cleaning and care-taking, the McGuinty government is already ordering the privatization of those services and putting those services out to cutthroat bidding. We know what that means: Those dedicated hospital workers who have kept the hospital clean, who have provided safe and good, nutritious food, are being told that they no longer have a job. These services are going to be turned over to a private corporation, and the private corporation is in turn going to say to the workers, "You do this work for minimum wage." Let me tell you, this is not going to be good for the cleanliness and the health and safety of the hospitals, it's not going to be good for the quality or the nutrition of the food and it's not going to be good for those dedicated hospital workers who are now going to be paid much less for doing important work. But once again we see this broken promise of the McGuinty government and once again we see their shallow and hollow commitment to our medicare system and to a quality hospital system. This is what we're going to see, and that's what will be demonstrated in this broken promise in the budget.

I next want to talk a bit about education and tuition. I remember a Dalton McGuinty who said that tuition fees at universities and colleges were already too high and he was going to freeze tuition fees. What do we see in the announcement that is part of this budget? Contrary to their promise, the McGuinty government is going to increase university and college fees significantly. That means taking more money out of the pockets of students who are already hard-pressed. It means that students who come from modest-income and lower-income families are going to have a very difficult time. The McGuinty government's answer to those students is, "Take on more debt." Ontario university and college students already carry the highest levels of debt of any students in the country. But once again, this broken promise by the McGuinty government: There's not going to be a freeze in tuition fees; there's going to be an increase. What does this mean? It means that since 1994 tuition in Ontario has increased by 125%, to become one of the highest-tuition rate provinces in Canada. In the same period, student debt has doubled. Student debt now stands at an average of over \$22,000. A student will have to pay \$300 a month over the next 10 years to pay down their loan. So a student graduating at age 24 will have a scenario where they'll be paying down their student debt until age 34 as a result of the tuition increases of the McGuinty government. A further 5% increase in undergraduate tuition will put tuition at almost \$5,500 by 2007—again, a \$500 increase.

It would have cost the McGuinty government only \$150 million to extend the tuition freeze through this year. The McGuinty government, which had a \$3-billion revenue windfall last year, after promising students that it would freeze tuition, would not come up with the \$150 million out of that \$3-billion windfall to freeze tuition.

Graduate programs will see even steeper increases of up to 8% a year in tuition fees. This means that a program like medicine at the University of Toronto will see tuition of over \$20,000 a year very soon. There's already evidence that shows that students coming from modest-income families, even middle-income families, students who have all of the academic ability and academic preparation, are now not going on to medical school simply because they cannot afford \$20,000 a year in tuition fees. That was the evidence before the McGuinty government came to power, and it's increasingly evident now that the McGuinty government has chosen to increase tuition fees even more.

But it's not just university and college students; apprentices aren't seeing any relief either. The McGuinty government has broken its promise to scrap the Conservative government's imposed classroom fee for apprentices. Other provinces have frozen these fees or done away with them. The McGuinty government continues these user fees on apprentices, even after Dalton McGuinty promised to eliminate them.

I just want to say a few words about elementary and secondary schools. This government tries to promote itself as an education government, but what we find when we look at the budget is that the increases to the education budget are about half of the \$824 million that school boards actually need to meet their increased costs. In fact, increases to grants for student needs are routinely being raided by school boards to provide for costs like heating and keeping the lights on. The McGuinty government hasn't provided an increase to cover heating costs since 1997. We all know how much the cost of natural gas has gone up, how much the cost of heating oil has gone up, how much the McGuinty government has driven hydro rates higher, and yet there is nothing in this budget, nothing from the McGuinty government to cover those costs, so that budget money that's supposed to be allocated to student needs, like textbooks and learning materials, is being raided to cover heating and electricity costs.

Last year, the Toronto school board, for example, spent half their budget for English as a second language to cover heating costs. Imagine that. With the pressing need for more English-as-a-second-language services, in the Toronto school board they were forced to spend half of their English-as-a-second-language budget just to cover heating costs, because the McGuinty government hasn't improved and updated the school funding formula as they promised.

I want to spend just a few minutes talking about the energy issue. I remember when Dalton McGuinty stared into the camera and said that he was going to freeze electricity rates until 2006. What do we see? We see that

electricity rates have skyrocketed. We see, from the information that was just received today, that there is likely to be a further 11% increase in hydroelectricity rates this spring under the McGuinty government. Why is this happening? It's happening for a number of reasons. Because the McGuinty government wants to pursue a scheme for \$40 billion in new, expensive, unreliable nuclear power plants, and the McGuinty government wants to further privatize electricity supply—both of those things. The privatization will add 20% to the hydro bill long-term, and going down the road of expensive, unreliable nuclear power will increase consumers' hydro-electricity bills in a way that is not sustainable.

1600

This is already having a dramatic impact on jobs in the province. We have seen the loss of 100,000 manufacturing jobs in Ontario over the last year, and in many of those cases companies are very blunt about what's happening. In the pulp sector, in the paper sector, in the tire-making sector, in the steel sector, where they've shed jobs, companies have come forward and simply said, "Look, these incredible electricity rate increases make it very difficult for us to sustain operations in Ontario, so we're closing down and laying off workers."

In fact, what is happening across northern and central Ontario is that pulp and paper companies are shutting down their operations and moving production to provinces like Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba—or even to some American states—because companies are finding that under the McGuinty government their hydro bill for their paper mill, their pulp mill, is now two and a half or three times what they would be paying in other provinces. As we know, the manufacturing process utilizes a lot of electricity, and so they simply cannot afford to continue production in Ontario under the sky-high electricity rate increases of the McGuinty government. What this essentially means is that Ontario is exporting good-paying manufacturing jobs from Ontario communities to communities in Quebec, British Columbia, Michigan, Wisconsin or Minnesota. This didn't have to happen. It's happening as a result of the wrong-headed hydroelectricity policies of the McGuinty government.

Many manufacturers in this province are calling for a more rational, more thoughtful and more sustainable hydroelectricity policy from this government. They were hoping for some evidence of it in this budget. What did they find? No rational, thoughtful, sustainable electricity policy; just another 11% increase, which is going to kill more jobs, make it more difficult for manufacturers, make it more difficult for small business, make it more difficult for farmers and make it more difficult for modest-, middle- and lower-income families in this province.

I think people were hoping to see, in conjunction with this budget, some action on energy efficiency and energy conservation. After all, energy efficiency and energy conservation are cheaper than building \$40 billion in new nuclear plants and are also better for the environment. But once again, no action on that front either.

Finally, there were a number of municipalities—large municipalities and small municipalities—that wanted to see some response from the McGuinty government with respect to the issue of provincial downloading. We know that under the former Conservative government they began to download the costs of policing, the costs of social assistance, the costs of seniors' housing, the costs of child care and the costs of many health matters as well. In opposition, Dalton McGuinty said that this downloading was wrong and he said he would reverse it. What we're seeing is in fact that the downloading is increasing under the McGuinty government. Downloading is getting worse. We saw Mayor David Miller of Toronto point out that because the McGuinty government doesn't pay their own bills, the city of Toronto had to fork over \$300 million to pay bills on services that are really provincial services. So the McGuinty government has failed to reverse the downloading that started under the former Conservative government; in fact, they've made the downloading worse.

There were a lot of municipalities—rural municipalities, northern municipalities, large urban municipalities—that wanted to see in this budget some steps taken to start to reverse the downloading. After all, the McGuinty government had \$3 billion in windfall revenue in the past 12 months that they could have used to start to reverse and redress the downloading. The budget numbers show that they're going to have even more tax revenue than that in the 12 months going forward that they could have used to redress and start to reverse the downloading by the province onto municipalities. But once again, the McGuinty government refused to do that, and in refusing to do that, they have broken yet another promise.

I think that municipality after municipality ought to take note of this. In fact, if I were to describe this budget, I would describe it as the McGuinty attempt to purchase another by-election—in this case, the McGuinty attempt to purchase the Toronto–Danforth by-election. Even people from Toronto, if they look at this budget, are going to find that, yes, there was \$1 billion and something put into a trust fund—I prefer to think of it more as a slush fund. That's how the federal Auditor General described these kinds of trust funds. They're completely unaccountable and they very quickly become slush funds. The McGuinty government is putting this money into a \$1 billion-plus slush fund, with no schedule whatsoever for the building of new transit; no blueprint, no schedule—nothing. So the people of Toronto, the people of the greater Toronto area, are not going to see any of this money any time soon either. Actually, though, they may see it in the two- or three-month run-up to the next provincial election. That's what I mean. Instead of the McGuinty government addressing the real needs in terms of downloading or the plight of farmers or the plight of students who are facing tuition hikes, the McGuinty government didn't do any of that. They literally took much of the \$3-billion revenue windfall and put it into their pre-election slush fund. Mark my words: You'll see how

this slush fund is going to be used in the three- or four-month run-up to the next election.

The next issue I want to raise—and it's related in part to the downloading and also in part to energy costs—is the issue of the loss of so many jobs. Between June 2004 and January 2006, Ontario lost 12% of its manufacturing. Many people out there—academics and economists—are saying: “It's time for Ontario to put together a job strategy. It's time for Ontario to respond to this. Don't just sit there and watch the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs, and don't do anything to increase the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs.” People were calling for a job strategy from the McGuinty government in this budget. Is there any job strategy? None. Only one new manufacturing initiative was announced, an incentive to supposedly encourage hybrid vehicles in Ontario.

What Ontario needs and what wasn't announced in the budget is an end to skyrocketing electricity rates, improved severance, advance notice, a greater onus on employers to justify mass layoffs and closures, and a one-stop shop providing assistance in job-loss restructuring situations. We are losing jobs unnecessarily. We are losing manufacturing operations and manufacturing plants that could be sustained if this government had a job strategy, if this government was willing to use some of that \$3-billion revenue windfall in a positive way. But no, the McGuinty government isn't prepared to do that. They want to use most of their revenue windfall to protect their political hides and to create an electoral slush fund rather than looking after the legitimate needs of Ontario's workers.

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In connection with that, I want to talk for a minute about the crisis we see on our farms. The McGuinty government wants you to believe that the BSE crisis is over. The McGuinty government wants you to believe that all of those farmers, whether they raised beef, whether they ran heifer operations or whether they ran cow-calf operations, that's all over with and those farmers are doing well. Nothing could be further from the truth. Literally tens of thousands of farmers, whether they be in cow-calf, whether they be actual beef producers, whether they be in heifer production for milk cows, are just as hard-pressed as ever. They were hoping to see something in this budget that would make a difference for them, something that would allow them to obtain some sustainable financing so they could rebuild the equity in their farm operations. Anything in this budget? Nothing at all.

Similarly, grains and oilseeds producers—I'm talking here about people who might grow corn, grain or even soya beans—were hoping they would see something in this budget in terms of a longer-term risk management strategy; they wanted to see a risk management plan. Quebec has a risk management plan for their grain and oilseed farmers. Alberta has a risk management strategy for their grain and oilseed farmers. Manitoba has put measures in place to help their grain and oilseed farmers

that are quite positive. Farmers were hoping they would see something here from the McGuinty government, given the McGuinty government's \$3-billion revenue windfall. Did the farmers see anything? No; farmers left here very disappointed and very frustrated. It's as if the McGuinty government doesn't care if tens of thousands of farm families lose their livelihoods, lose their farming operations. It's as if the McGuinty government is more concerned with saving their own political skin and using much of their \$3-billion revenue windfall to set up their pre-election political slush fund than they are with working with farmers to create a risk management strategy.

I want to be clear. Farmers are not asking for a hand-out. They're not asking for a \$100-million announcement from the McGuinty government tomorrow or next week. What farmers are saying is, “It is risky now to be in farming. Because of the American subsidies of their grain and oilseed farmers, because of the aftermath of the BSE crisis, it is very risky to be in farming.” Conditions will improve over time, but what farmers need is the McGuinty government and the federal government to come to the table with them, to engage and to create a risk management strategy so that the risk can be shared. What did they get from the McGuinty government in this budget? They got the back of the hand; no risk management strategy whatsoever.

I also want to raise an issue the McGuinty government talks about a lot but doesn't do anything about. The McGuinty government talks about welcoming new Canadians to the Ontario economy. It talks about working with new Canadians so they can find a place in the Ontario economy and help grow prosperity in this province. They talk a lot, but they don't do anything.

Let me give you an example. It's very clear that if new Canadians are to be able to take their place in the Ontario economy, one of the things they will need is access to English-as-a-second-language services. In fact, what we know is that the need for more English-as-a-second-language services is growing at a dramatic rate. The McGuinty government promised to give schools the resources needed to provide high-quality English-as-a-second-language instruction, but they haven't delivered. Forty per cent of Toronto schools that have students with English-as-a-second-language needs don't have English-as-a-second-language teachers—an increase of 16% since 1999. Despite the McGuinty government's promises, the situation is actually getting worse. Was there anything in this budget to address that? No; nothing; nada. This is as a result of the overall education funding shortfall. About half of the Toronto District School Board's English-as-a-second-language budget was raided last year to pay for school heating costs because the McGuinty government hasn't updated and improved the funding formula for our schools, as they promised.

Also on this front, the government is going to cut and privatize services provided by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. I don't need to tell you how important the human rights commission is to new Canadians. The Ontario Human Rights Commission provides new Can-

adians and other minorities with protection from discrimination. However, the McGuinty government has decided to undermine that protection with the McGuinty government's plan to eliminate investigation services at the Ontario Human Rights Commission and to basically say to people, "If you want to have your human rights complaint investigated, you should find a lawyer and pay for that lawyer yourself." It's the privatization of human rights commission services. This is going to undermine human rights protection in this province in a very serious way.

A final issue that is very important to new Canadians is the recognition of credentials and academic achievement obtained outside of Ontario. Dalton McGuinty promised to eliminate, within the first year of the McGuinty government, barriers preventing foreign-trained professionals from practising their professions. Now into the third year of the McGuinty government, we are still waiting, and this budget continues this pattern of neglect—no new funding for bridge training and no commitment to get tough with professional organizations that are shutting foreign-trained professionals out; no assistance to mitigate the high cost of getting accreditation, either.

I want to also address the issue of child care because, you know what? Boy, the McGuinty government has a lot to say about child care. They talk about child care, they talk about child care, they talk about child care. What did we see with respect to child care in this budget? What we see is the McGuinty government actually cutting child care funding in this budget—a \$186-million cut to child care funding. That translates into a 22% reduction in child care funding in this province at a time when the McGuinty government had a \$3-billion revenue surplus last year, and the figures show they're going to have an even bigger revenue surplus in the year going forward. What are they doing? They're cutting child care funding for our kids. But you know what? It's worse than that, because Dalton McGuinty promised that not only wouldn't he cut child care, but to invest an additional \$300 million of provincial money in child care. No \$300-million investment; instead, a \$186-million cut—almost a \$500-million difference between what they're doing and what they promised.

Then there's the issue of the clawback of the national child benefit supplement. I don't think there were too many issues that Dalton McGuinty was more sanctimonious on than this issue. When the Conservative government announced they were going to claw back the national child benefit supplement, Dalton McGuinty said that was morally wrong. He said it was morally wrong and he said a McGuinty government would end it.

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Well, here we are into the third year of the McGuinty government, with literally one in six children in the province living in poverty, with not tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands of Ontario children living in poverty. The McGuinty government has \$3 billion of surplus revenue, windfall revenue. It would cost only

\$220 million to stop taking, to stop clawing back, money from the poorest kids in the province. Did the McGuinty government do that? No. Suddenly that sanctimonious promise doesn't matter anymore. Suddenly that sanctimonious, "This is morally wrong, and a McGuinty government will end it," is not important anymore.

I just want people to know what is really going on here. This is the equivalent of the family allowance. The federal government used to provide a family allowance to families so they'd have the extra money to purchase a new pair of shoes for their kids, to purchase maybe a new jacket for them before winter, or mitts and a toque, or maybe a new pair of boots or running shoes. I remember that in my family, that's what my mother used the family allowance for. When the family allowance cheque came in, that meant that maybe I was going to get a new pair of pants or maybe a new jacket or a new pair of running shoes. That's what families use this for.

This is for lower- and modest-income families. This is very necessary money. It means the difference between children having clothes on their backs and not having clothes on their backs. For most families it's \$1,500 a year for a child, and for two children it comes out to about \$2,700 a year. The McGuinty government continues to take that money from the poorest kids in this province. At a time when the McGuinty government has had a \$3-billion revenue windfall, they continue to take money from the poorest kids in this province. That is shameful and disgusting—

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): And immoral.

Mr. Hampton: —and immoral, yet the McGuinty government continues to do it.

It doesn't end there. As I pointed out before the last election, Dalton McGuinty sent letters and e-mails to literally tens of thousands of parents who have children afflicted with autism, parents who are very desperate to get their kids one-on-one intensive counselling so that the children can start to overcome this affliction of autism.

Dalton McGuinty wrote to those parents and e-mailed them and said that the policy of the former Conservative government to end IBI treatment, to end intensive behavioural counselling, at age six was wrong and that the McGuinty government would end it. Here we have the McGuinty government, again with the \$3-billion windfall tax revenues, and did they end the discrimination against autistic children? No, they didn't do that either.

Finally, I just want to raise some issues that are unique to my part of the province, the part of the province where I grew up, where I live and that I'm very proud of: northern Ontario.

I looked at the \$1 billion-plus that the McGuinty government is putting into their pre-election slush fund, and I looked at the amount of money they were showering around the greater Toronto area to try to purchase the Toronto-Danforth by-election. Then I looked at the needs of northern Ontario. What about those hard-pressed communities in northern Ontario where they've seen literally thousands of jobs lost as a result of the irrational McGuinty government policy of driving elec-

tricity rates through the roof, which has killed pulp mill and paper mill after pulp mill and paper mill? What was in the budget to help those communities and to help those workers?

In short, there was virtually nothing. The government says, "Oh, we're going to spend \$400 million on bridges and roads," but that's \$400 million spread between all the rural municipalities and small towns in southern Ontario and all the municipalities and small towns in northern Ontario. That works out to maybe \$100,000 for this municipality, maybe a couple of hundred thousand dollars for that municipality. And it's one-time money. It's not going to reverse the downloading. It's not going to replace the thousands of good-paying jobs that were lost. It's not going to replace the millions of dollars that were lost in property tax assessment. It's not going to do anything like that.

Just to give two examples, two communities I'm aware of in particular. The community of Pickle Lake, a small community of only 350 people: Do you know what the McGuinty government did to the community of Pickle Lake this spring? They increased their policing costs. Get this. For 350 people, they increased their policing costs by \$587,000; 350 people, about 100 homes, are going to be hit with a policing download of \$587,000. Do you know what it amounts to? It amounts to a \$2,000 increase in the property tax bill just to cover the McGuinty download. The community of Sioux Lookout, very similar: People in Sioux Lookout are being hit with a \$1,200 property tax increase to pay for the downloading of policing services in that community. This is repeated all over northern Ontario.

I have a new name for the Ontario Provincial Police. They're not the Ontario Provincial Police anymore; they're the Dalton McGuinty police download. That's what we should be calling them across the province: the Dalton McGuinty downloaded police service, because they certainly aren't a provincial police service anymore; the McGuinty government doesn't pay for them. Municipalities and municipal taxpayers are having to pay the full load because of the McGuinty government download. I was hoping we would see something to address this. Was there anything to address that downloading? Nothing.

But it gets worse. In communities that have lost their paper mill or their pulp mill, one place they might be able to turn to in terms of helping to buttress their economy would be tourism. As you know, across northern Ontario there are thousands of lakes, beautiful scenery and forests, and good fishing and hunting and birdwatching—all kinds of wilderness tourism opportunities. People were hoping they'd see some investment in tourism. But do you know what happened on the tourism front? A \$100-million cut to the tourism budget. It's as if the McGuinty government isn't satisfied with putting the boot to the pulp and paper industry in northern Ontario; they want to take the knife to the tourism sector as well.

Similarly with aboriginal affairs: At a time when the Kashechewan crisis shows that we have pressing needs in our First Nations and that aboriginal people are facing

more and more inequality all the time, I was hoping we'd see perhaps an increase in the aboriginal affairs budget. But no, what we see is a \$28-million or 57% cut to the ministry responsible for aboriginal affairs under the McGuinty government. The Ministry of Transportation, which has important work to do in northern Ontario, is seeing a \$265-million or 12% cut. The Ministry of Northern Development, which is important for northern transportation and services to northern municipalities, is taking a \$10-million or 7% cut.

I say to all those people across northern Ontario, you know what? I think the McGuinty government has it figured out this way. The McGuinty government thinks that they can shut down your pulp mills and your paper mills, that they can chop \$100 million out of the tourism budget, that they can cut the aboriginal affairs budget by 57%, that they can cut the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines budget by 7%, that they can cut all these services that are important to northern Ontario, and yet the McGuinty government thinks you will still vote for them.

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I say to the people of northern Ontario, don't be taken in again. When the McGuinty government has over \$1 billion for a pre-election slush fund that they want to shower around the greater Toronto area and when the McGuinty government can use some of their \$3 billion of revenue surplus to try to purchase a by-election in the greater Toronto area, it's pretty clear: The McGuinty government is taking people of northern and rural Ontario communities for granted, and the McGuinty government deserves to hear from mayors and reeves and councillors in northern Ontario and mayors and reeves and councillors of rural Ontario for such a budget that was so unfair, that so obviously failed to respond to the real needs of real people across Ontario. For that, this budget deserves to be condemned. For that, this budget deserves the criticism and the ridicule that it is receiving across northern and rural Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): It gives me pleasure to enter into the debate today. This is my first opportunity in my role as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance to debate in the House and in committee.

To start, though, if I can, I've listened intently over the past couple of days to the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the third party. From my experience in municipal governance and even here, I understand what reserve funds are: Setting money aside so that for very specific kinds of areas you'll have the resource to do the certain work necessary. I understand the idea of rate stabilization funds. Those were funds that often municipally would allow you to take out the bumps in the system. I understand the concept of setting up a trust fund that establishes on a go-forward basis the opportunity, when partners come together, to undertake substantive initiatives.

I'm somewhat dismayed, though, that on repeated occasions, both the leader of the official opposition and the leader of the third party would constantly refer to the words "slush fund." As a matter of fact, I think probably at another time that may have been raised as a matter considered to be something unparliamentary within this Legislature. So I hope that as we go forward, people can speak to it, whether it's trust funds or reserve funds or other strategies for financial stability, and avoid the rather trite type of referrals to money that would otherwise be used in a somewhat inappropriate fashion.

I want to talk to the budget in the context of our business plan. Budgets are not one-off situations. Businesses and governments don't plan on one-off annual opportunities. They plan in a fashion that allows for a plan of action over a period of time. In the government's case, in our case, it's a four-year plan, because we know exactly the length of our term of office, with a fixed election date in October 2007. Thus, we set out when we took office to plan accordingly during that period of time.

We didn't only inherit from the former government a massive fiscal deficit of some \$5.5 billion; we inherited a health care deficit, an education and skills training deficit, and an infrastructure deficit. So we've set out during the mandate to deal with the health care deficit, and during our first budget focused very clearly on that as the centrepiece, the core, of that budget initiative.

In our second budget, we focused clearly on education and skills, post-secondary opportunities, through the Reaching Higher plan, a \$6.2-billion commitment over five years to the future of this province, to the necessary training and growth that will go on in that regard, to the establishment of some 75,000 new spaces, new opportunities for young people and adults, either for their first post-secondary-related learning or through lifelong learning strategies, and focused on things like additional student aid for those who are the most disadvantaged in our communities.

This is the third in a four-part budgetary and planning strategy. This year we have chosen to focus our attention on the infrastructure deficit. That particular deficit is one that needs the attention of government. It is one that has been recognized nationally by national and provincial leaders. It's one that has been recognized internationally as a deficit in Canada that diminishes our opportunity to attract investment to this country and grow this economy.

That's why we've announced Move Ontario, a new \$1.2-billion investment in public transit, in municipal roads and bridges. The centerpiece of Move Ontario is an \$838-million investment to enable the expansion and modernization of public transit in the greater Toronto area. It is sorely needed and has been sadly neglected. This will include a new subway into York region, crossing boundaries from 416 to 905 for the first time in our history, and new projects that will help to fight gridlock and speed travel across large and mature municipalities such as Brampton and Mississauga.

We're fulfilling a commitment that we started out on when we came to office to provide two cents a litre of

gas tax to municipalities. In the very first budget, as part of the plan there was a one-cent commitment. Last year, we followed that up with half a cent, and this October the final instalment of that two cents a litre will be provided to municipalities for transit purposes in communities throughout Ontario.

Not only have we fulfilled that commitment to municipalities on a key agenda, but we've changed the way that the monies can be used by municipalities. We understood from them that there was a need initially for capital investment, but we also heard clearly that they needed flexibility. That flexibility was to allow them to use it for operating costs as well. So in this budget we've included the additional half cent for the full two cents a litre of gas tax as well as expanded the capacity to use that not only for capital costs but also for operations.

I can only hope that our federal partners, who also understand the need of transit and transportation, will visit the earlier commitment to staging up to five cents a litre in gas tax from federal revenues. This new government will have to undertake a review of that, but I think it is incumbent upon us on all sides of the House to encourage that partnership such that it's a true partnership among all the participants, municipally, provincially and federally.

Through the ReNew Ontario plan, the government will provide a total of some \$3.4 billion to improve our highway network in southern Ontario, and \$1.8 billion for highways in northern Ontario. Not only that, but on a one-time basis only, one-time funding only—and those cheques are going out as quickly as the bureaucracy can turn them around for municipalities as they prepare for their current budgets and their current build year—some \$400 million to some 428 municipalities across Ontario, with special emphasis on small and rural municipalities.

Let me give you an example, if I could, from my own community. In the city of Pickering, that will mean some \$1.85 million. In the neighbouring municipality of Ajax, of which I represent part, it will be some \$1.57 million, and in Durham region, on a regional scale, it will be an additional \$10.77 million. In the rural and small municipalities—my riding has not only part of Pickering and Ajax, which are relatively urban in a suburban context, but also Uxbridge, which is principally rural. The population in Pickering and Ajax is in the range of 95,000 people. Uxbridge's population is probably somewhere around 16,000 or 17,000, so about a fifth. Yet the contribution for upgrading roads and bridges in Uxbridge will be some \$560,000, roughly a third of what those larger municipalities are getting. So it's a clear indication that there is funding in an enhanced fashion for rural and northern municipalities throughout Ontario.

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We're also moving forward on some very important initiatives to the economy of this province, and that's funding, with the federal government's engagement, of over \$300 million in the Windsor gateway and some \$323 million in investment in the Niagara and Sarnia crossings. This is a business imperative. In my commun-

ity, the broader community of Durham region, General Motors is very important. The likes of General Motors and others in this province understand how important it is that our border crossings work effectively. We certainly have to have the security that comes with borders, but we also need the capacity to move goods and services as well as people across those borders in an efficient and effective way. These do require major investments. Any of us who travel to the United States, whether for business or pleasure, know the constraints. We know the time it takes. We can see the long lines of trucks trying to move across those borders, not only bringing goods that we might need a week or a month from now, but bringing goods that we need in a matter of hours to ensure that the assembly lines continue to function. Without the capacity to move people across those borders, to move services and goods across those borders effectively, it impacts significantly on our economic health.

Through the initiatives of Move Ontario and ReNew Ontario, and our electricity agenda, we'll create some 500,000 jobs by 2012. That's part of that long-range planning strategy.

I want to speak just for a moment on the health initiatives. Our first budget focused clearly on health as the centrepiece but it didn't stop there; it began there. Each year in these key agendas we are investing more and more in Ontarians, and we're investing more and more in the health of Ontarians even as we transform the system to ensure that the services are quicker, better and more effective and efficient.

The government has led the fight to prevent illness, including a ban on smoking in all enclosed public spaces and workspaces and providing over two million childhood vaccines free of charge. This is all part of the earlier strategy and we have much more to do. In this budget it was announced that Ontario will now help families with children living with type 1 diabetes by funding insulin pumps and related supplies for some 6,500 children. Interestingly, it's a matter that was brought forward and debated on multiple occasions as a private member's bill. It's one of those types of initiatives in this Legislature, apart from government, that individual members in a private member's fashion have the opportunity to bring forward, with the support of their colleagues, and see it come into law and support the health of young people in Ontario.

We're planning for things like an influenza pandemic, like the avian flu. We've put in place 100 of the 150 family health teams that we've committed to during the mandate. We're training some 200 international medical graduates each and every year to relieve the strains and stresses we have on the capacity for Ontarians to get access to medical care from family practitioners. We'll be creating over 100 new undergraduate medical spaces, and not necessarily in the traditional places we think of but in Mississauga, Kitchener-Waterloo, St. Catharines and Windsor. We're expanding the opportunities, for young people who have an interest in medicine, who have the capacity to fulfill that type of intense learning environment, closer to home. They may not need to have

the many thousands of dollars necessary to live in residence or live off-campus; they may be able to live right at home.

Wait times are down in many cases, in many areas, for many of the types of things we have been talking about, whether it's cataracts, cardiac surgery or hip and knee replacements. We're investing through tenders and/or RFPs, depending on the financial structure put in place, in major new hospitals across the province, in communities like Belleville, in communities like my own in Ajax-Pickering, and in London, Mississauga, Toronto, Sarnia, Hamilton, Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie. That's just this year's budget; that's not what we've already done. That's not the Bramptons, the Peterboroughs and others that are already in place. And it's not the end, because there certainly is more to do.

I could probably spend considerably more time on this budget. There are just too many good things happening in Ontario to be able to cover in a very short period of time. I just wanted to highlight a few key areas and to acknowledge this as part of a four-year business plan, not a one-off budget situation.

As we move into the fourth and final year of this mandate, we'll continue the good work we have been doing in an effort to ensure that we fulfill our obligations to the people of Ontario, that the economy remains strong, that people are healthier and have more opportunities for education, and that we are well positioned on a go-forward basis to do yet more in the province of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to add some comments to the speech from the member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge, who has been speaking about the budget motion.

The budget, of course, came down last Thursday. He referred to the comments of the leader of the third party and of the opposition leader about the billion dollars that they call a reserve fund and that we call a slush fund. The worst thing about this budget is the creative accounting involved and the lengths to which the government has had to go to to make sure the budget is not balanced. I'm sure they have some scheme as to why they want to make sure the budget is not balanced, and I'm sure it has probably got a political bent to it. But we have to look back at this year and realize that the government, from the plan they had a year ago, received an extra \$3 billion in revenue. In just the last few years, we've seen revenues go from some \$68 billion to, I believe, \$85.7 billion that's predicted this year, a \$17-billion increase in revenue, and yet still this government is not balancing the budget.

Over the term of this government, we're going to see the debt of the province increase by some \$10 billion. The forecast in the budget for interest charges, for the next year that we will start on April 1, is \$9.4 billion. That's what we'll be spending on interest, money we won't be spending assisting farmers, improving the

health care system or investing in tourism marketing. I think that's a real shame and I think that in relatively good times, when we have extra money, it's absolutely irresponsible to put forward a budget that you don't balance under these conditions.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments?

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): Little ol' me. Here I am. I get to respond to the honourable member's discourse, as it might be, when it comes to his thoughts on the provincial budget. Now, I am not surprised. He is a member of the governing caucus, of course. He's going to get up and praise the budget, and you're not going to be surprised that I'm going to get up and say some bad things about the budget. But I'm going to try to be a little bit fair. Every budget has good and bad; I don't care who the government is. Governments make decisions about how they're going to spend the dollars that are collected by the province of Ontario. If it's an NDP government, a Liberal government or a Conservative government, there are going to be some good things in a budget and there are going to be some bad things in the budget.

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I've got to say, from my perspective where I live in northern Ontario, it's not a very good budget. The government says that it's investing in people. Well, I look at what's happening in northeastern and northwestern Ontario, and the forestry sector is being decimated. They had a \$3-billion surplus they tried to figure out how to spend. They said, "We're going to put some of it in infrastructure." I support that. I think spending dollars on infrastructure is a good thing. It's something we have to do as a government, making sure that our roads and bridges, our hospitals and other public facilities are kept up. I don't have an argument with that. But I'm saying that I sat there and watched the budget and what I saw was, over 85% to 90% of the dollars of the Ministry of Transportation being spent in a very condensed geographic area around the city of Toronto: Brampton, Mississauga, Toronto and others. Now, am I opposed to subway extensions? Of course not. I was a member of a government that did the largest subway extension in the history of Ontario. However, I say that there are investments we can be doing across this province, and it seems to me that the government loaded its investments and skewed them against northern Ontario.

The other issue is the whole issue of how it affects children. He talked about the health of children. My God. Your government can end the clawback and put dollars in the pockets of parents so they can feed their kids so they don't go to bed hungry at night.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I'm privileged to have an opportunity to comment briefly on the remarks made by the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. I just wanted to say simply that the budget we heard last Thursday had a lot of good news in it and a lot of good things for all parts of Ontario.

I wanted in this brief minute or so to talk a little bit about some of the things in Scarborough. For a long time,

we have asked for and have pushed hard for a subway in Scarborough, and I'm glad to see that in Scarborough \$1 million is being allocated or set aside for an environmental assessment, or an EA, to be done. This is the first step towards bringing in a subway system in Scarborough. I think that's good news for the residents there. Previously, the transportation minister did bring an additional platform at the tracks at Kennedy station for the GO station there, which was good. I think this additional step of allowing the environmental assessment will eventually bring to fruition a subway system in Scarborough.

Also, the \$200 million that's being given to the city of Toronto for transit is quite important. That's something that is quite significant. I remember my days on city council when we would come cap in hand to the province, asking for money to pay for the TTC, for capital costs. It's nice to see that \$200 million is being given this way.

Also, the gas tax is being increased by a further one cent. I think that's significant, because that money can be used for either operating or capital costs. That's quite important as well.

Also, I wanted to mention that the budget is not closing hospitals in Scarborough. In fact, an additional \$35 million is being allocated for emergency services at Scarborough General. We're seeing money put into youth at risk, vulnerable adults and families, and several other good things, which I'd like to talk about later throughout this debate.

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I'm really pleased to speak on the budget debate. Certainly, in the city of Barrie and surrounding areas, we're very disappointed with the lack of attention and financial will from this government to deal with probably the fastest-growing area in Ontario in terms of their infrastructure needs, transportation needs and health care needs.

We've been working very hard to bring GO Transit from Bradford West Gwillimbury up to the city of Barrie, in terms of all the transportation announcements, in terms of trying to get cars off the highway. One of the fastest-growing areas is the city of Barrie, down through there to Highway 9, tremendous traffic flow, and they're doing nothing from Highway 9 up in terms of dealing with that traffic congestion. The investment is needed with respect to GO Transit, to bring it up to the city of Barrie, and would be very positive from the environment perspective and the economic perspective in terms of dealing with Simcoe county.

Also, I was looking at the hospital funding in terms of the projects that are out there that are going to be tendered. I would hope that the projects that are going to be tendered—the community has backed those projects, and they're in a position to actually go ahead. In the city of Barrie, the RVH expansion we're looking at is much needed. Anyone who has to go to RVH knows that we need the expansion now and not far off into the future. They were looking at construction hopefully in 2008, but

we need it now. I know the community has done the fundraising, and our position is for those community funding requirements to be met and to proceed forward with construction of the RVH expansion in 2006.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Arthurs: I want to thank the members for Parry Sound-Muskoka, Timmins-North Bay, Scarborough Southwest and Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford for their comments in respect to—

Mr. Bisson: It's an empire now. Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Arthurs: Sorry; Timmins-James Bay. You're not quite that big. Understandably.

Two minutes is not a lot of time at this point. Nonetheless, speaking to the issue of a balanced budget, it was a former government that left us with a \$5.5-billion hole to climb out of. Our first priority was to health and education and the economy of this province and, at the same time, dealing with the fiscal deficit that a former finance minister left us with. In the time we've had, at the beginning of our third budget, that deficit is now reduced by 75%—a 75% reduction—and we're looking at \$1.4 billion at this point. That's a rather massive achievement during that period of time, and also addressing the agenda that we need to address.

Are we doing as much as everyone would like in each riding? Probably not—in my own and others. But are we doing what's right across the province of Ontario? Clearly, in my view, we are. We are uploading roads to support the forest industry; we are establishing a mining research centre in Sudbury; we've looked at Atikokan from the standpoint of a bio-energy research centre—all of those things to lift people up in northern Ontario and provide opportunities on a go-forward basis.

In Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford and other communities that need infrastructure, Move Ontario will fund those municipalities. Two cents a litre of gas tax will help to support their opportunities for improving their transit systems. There are major investments in GO Transit, with new buses and a new rail opportunity, and ultimately it will serve the people of Ontario all that much better.

There is a lot in this budget. There is something in this budget for each and every riding across the province of Ontario. Not enough for all—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you very much. Further debate on the budget motion? I recognize the member for Erie-Lincoln.

Applause.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): Thank you very much to my colleagues.

I'm pleased to respond to the budget motion brought forward by the Minister of Finance. I wish I could be standing to offer some compliments to the government. You always try to find something positive to say. I'll give some constructive criticism, but there's no doubt that this budget exemplifies the runaway spending, the big-spending, big-taxing ways of the Dalton McGuinty government, that continues the pattern we've seen established since they took over in October 2003.

Higher taxes mean that average working families in Ontario are finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. I think we all know the fact that working families in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario now have some \$2,000 less per year in their pockets. When you look at Dalton McGuinty's big increase in income taxes; when you look at the new user fees that Dalton McGuinty has imposed by privatizing chiropractic and physiotherapy care; when you equate into that the increase in utilities that we've seen—higher hydro rates, natural gas prices, home heating fuels across the board have increased substantially. While gas goes up and down sometimes, last time I filled up it was 96 cents a litre. I filled up at Beaver Gas in Beamsville just the other day. You combine all that, and working families in Ontario have about \$2,000 less in their pockets per year than they did before Dalton McGuinty came into office. That's one major issue I'll speak to a bit more.

1700

I would have expected, at a time that government revenues have gone through the roof, some increase in revenues beyond even their projections of a \$3-billion windfall, when you look at an increase in tax revenue, in savings, on lower-than-expected debt repayments. We saw an increase in government spending in 2005-06 of some \$6 billion. That's on top of a \$5-billion increase the previous fiscal year and a \$5-billion increase the year before, for a total of \$16 billion in increased spending by the McGuinty government, fuelled by higher taxes on the backs of working families and small businesses in Ontario. You would have thought, with that kind of lush position the treasury was in and spending that would make Bob Rae and David Peterson blush, that they would have found some break for working families or businesses in the province of Ontario, but that was nowhere to be found in Dalton McGuinty's new budget.

The second major challenge facing Ontario is the flight of manufacturing jobs from this province. In fact, in the last year some 80,000-plus well-paying manufacturing jobs have simply shut down in Ontario. Whether that's in Cornwall, whether that's in Collingwood, whether that's in St. Catharines or in Niagara, northern Ontario or in the GTA, the pattern is the same: Some 80,000 well-paying manufacturing jobs have fled the province.

Even when you look at Dalton McGuinty's own numbers in his own budget, we see that the major economic indicators are in a decline. We're seeing the trend heading downward on key things like gross domestic product growth. So how fast is the Ontario economy growing? At a lower rate than it used to; it's in a decline. Job creation in the province is down some 28% from the previous budget's figures. Employment growth is down 27%. Exports are down 26%. That's only comparing Ontario to Ontario. But if you compare Ontario's performance to the other provinces, the picture grows grimmer still.

I grew up, and you grew up, I think we all grew up, in an Ontario that led the nation in growth, that was the

envy of the other provinces. Whether you came from the Maritimes or British Columbia or the north, you looked to Ontario to live, work and raise a family—to find a job. That was the Ontario we grew up in, but it's certainly not anymore the reality today in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. In fact, on so many indicators Ontario is now at the average or below the growth rate of other provinces, or the creation of jobs is a percentage of total jobs in the province. In fact, I was absolutely shocked to find out that we actually have a net migration of Ontarians out of our province to other provinces and territories, and it's not just to Alberta. I recognize the job boom in Alberta, and God bless them for it, but it's not just Alberta but I believe a total of eight provinces and territories that are taking away more Ontarians than there are people coming here.

I'm incredulous. That's not the Ontario I grew up in. It was the opposite trend, where they'd come to our province, that we're not seeing today because of Dalton McGuinty's high taxes, runaway spending and misguided economic and hydro policies. We're losing talented Ontarians to other jurisdictions, and no hope. In fact, I think we'll see an exacerbation of that trend with this budget because it continues the high taxes and runaway spending and there is no economic policy to boast about in this budget.

The other concern I want to bring up today is the lack of transparency and accountability in this budget. Many members may have seen this, many members may not have seen this, but a new accounting system, or an extension of a new accounting system, was brought in in this budget. For the first time in Ontario's history, colleges, school boards, school authorities and hospitals are brought onto provincial books. We support that direction—we began that process—now that new entities come on, because basically the province controls most of the funding that goes to those entities.

This was done in British Columbia; but when British Columbia did it, they had a comparison of the estimates of the previous year and how they would be impacted by the new formula, and then the current fiscal year. The McGuinty Liberals did not express full accountability. They did not address the old numbers. They made the comparison between last year's estimates of spending and this year's actual spending much more difficult because they're hiding behind the accounting changes. I suspect we will get to the bottom of that, and I suspect we will find even more fiscal mismanagement, and probably the Liberals trying to claim benefits from good management, when it was simply a change in accounting tactics that got them to where they were.

I am saddened that the finance minister and the Premier have chosen to hide behind the accounting change and have not been fully forthcoming on how the accounting change would affect financial figures and the books, going backward for true comparison's sake.

Secondly—I am absolutely incredulous—when you look at the third-quarter financial estimates, the third-quarter financial update, and you compare that to the

budget—I think members know that there are quarterly updates on the financial figures. The one for the quarter ending December 31, 2005, came out sometime in late January. Sometime between that reporting in late January and the budget coming out in mid-March, about two months' time, there was an absolutely huge difference in spending and revenue levels in the two reports. In fact, some miracle must have transpired in January and February, because personal income taxes in the province went up by about \$1 billion. Just short of \$1 billion magically came into the treasury, we're supposed to believe, in that eight weeks' time. Corporate tax revenue—a similar story, I think. Roughly \$400 million magically appeared in the treasury. In fact, I believe if you look at the numbers, there is about a \$2.9-billion discrepancy in terms of what the province said they were going to have and what they actually had at the end of the day. So I will be curious and say to the finance minister, "What magic transpired? What sort of Harry Houdini appearance happened?" Did Doug Henning make a return to boost up the treasury at this time, or in fact did they doctor the third-quarter financial figures? Did they try to mislead taxpayers in Ontario by not being fully revealing about what the true numbers were?

Basically, Dalton McGuinty had about \$2.9 billion, almost \$3 billion, stuffed in his back pockets, overflowing out the sides. He then goes to Ottawa and says, "We're pleading poor," when his own documents, the financial papers that he puts forward, don't have the accurate numbers about provincial revenue. That is my third point. I'm concerned about the level of taxation and the impact on working families. I'm concerned about the performance of the Ontario economy, particularly relative to our historic position as a leader in Canada, now in so many ways middling at best, and I'm very concerned about the lack of accountability by the Ministry of Finance and by this government. I suspect it's not the civil servants of the Ministry of Finance. I think they want to be fully revealing, but I bet you they got orders from the minister's office to doctor the files that actually came forward, which can be tremendously damaging to Ontario's reputation when you see that kind of information that does not reflect the facts.

I talked a bit about the spending increase. The average increase in spending under Dalton McGuinty on a per annum basis is now exceeding \$5 billion a year. The first year it was about \$5 billion under Greg Sorbara's budget, and now under Dwight Duncan it goes up to \$6 billion. The total debt accumulated under the McGuinty government because of runaway spending: \$8.3 billion, now on the backs of taxpayers and future generations to pay that back, plus debt interest.

The average increase in program spending—if you take aside debt repayment, what is the government actually spending on programs in Ontario? I will ask Mr. Speaker if he wants to guess what the average increase in spending is. I think he would be right, if he was allowed to say—8% under the first year of the McGuinty government, 8% in their second year, and now, for 2005-06,

they beat that. I think it was about 9% or slightly more; about a 9.2% increase in program spending. That's incredible. I ask you, are taxpayers in Wellington county seeing a difference because of that increased spending? Are taxpayers in Guelph seeing a benefit from a 9% increase in program spending? Are taxpayers in Toronto seeing the benefit from a 9% increase in spending? I suggest not. If you ask the average person on the street, "Spending has gone up 9%, and have you seen the benefits?" I think they would be shocked that our spending has gone up that much without an impact of improved services to taxpayers.

The other challenge is that the average growth rate of nominal GDP has been roughly 4%. If you are spending at twice the rate of the economy's growth rate, it's simply unsustainable. It leaves us extremely vulnerable to changes in interest rates, changes in the dollar, downturns in the United States. But nonetheless, irresponsibly and recklessly, Dalton McGuinty has chosen to increase spending by 8%, 8% and then 9% per fiscal year, even though our economy is growing at 4% at best.

1710

In an interesting comparison, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation calculated average spending under the following governments: the last year of the David Peterson government, the Bob Rae government average, the Mike Harris-Ernie Eves government average and the Dalton McGuinty budgets. You're probably thinking to yourself, "David Peterson and Bob Rae were the very poster children of excessive, runaway government spending. They were the poster children of a government that couldn't keep control of finances and just spent on every whim." Well, I'll tell you, in the last year of David Peterson's government, the former gold medallist, it was about \$6,113 per capita, and these are in constant 2004 dollars. Bob Rae topped that. Bob Rae averaged \$6,380 in his budgets. The Mike Harris-Ernie Eves government average was a much more frugal \$5,962.

So what did Dalton McGuinty do compared to David Peterson and Bob Rae? Did I say those were the poster children for runaway spending?

Interjections: You did.

Mr. Hudak: Dalton McGuinty has left them in the dust. Dalton McGuinty is the gold medallist now for runaway spending. David Peterson and Bob Rae are back there heaving, trying to catch their breath with the runaway pace of Dalton McGuinty sprinting by them. Dalton McGuinty's 2004 budget spent \$6,514 per person, fully \$400 more than David Peterson spent per person. Then he topped it in 2005, with \$6,578 per capita. We'll see what this new budget means when we calculate those figures. But my goodness, imagine that picture: Dalton McGuinty in the big spending race sprinting by Bob Rae and David Peterson. Who would have thunk it?

Then again, today Dalton McGuinty goes to the Empire Club and starts pleading about the fiscal gap. We take this issue seriously. We want to help the Premier make his case with Ottawa to address the fiscal gap, but my goodness, it's getting hard, it's getting awfully hard,

when you see the Premier spending like a drunken sailor. And with all due respect to drunken sailors, at least they spend their own money. Dalton McGuinty is taking your money and taxpayers' money and spending it like it's going out of style, waking up the next day with a hangover, saying, "We need more money from Ottawa. We're running out." It's like somebody with a new suit, new shiny shoes and new hat going with that new cap in hand begging for money. You just can't take that seriously.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: If he got some deals; but he's not exactly getting deals. Maybe the squirrels got a deal; they look pretty happy. But Dalton McGuinty has done tremendous damage to our ability to address the fiscal gap.

First of all, he has a major credibility problem. This is a guy who has broken promises faster than he's increased spending, although I think it's pretty close—a major credibility problem. Sending a salesman to close the deal who has a reputation for not keeping his promises is problematic enough as it is. Secondly, on top of that, when you have a runaway spending budget like this, when you intentionally run a deficit, when he had plenty of opportunity to balance the books—I said earlier he had almost \$3 billion in windfall revenue. They say, "Ontario performed better than we thought it would." No; they doctored the books. They intentionally lowered expectations because they didn't want to have accountability. They stuffed their money into their pockets—they had a big pile over there in the Ministry of Finance—so they could do a big end-of-year spending spree and not be accountable for it.

Where was I on that analogy? I think I tortured that one a little bit.

Mr. Tascona: Squirrelly.

Mr. Hudak: No, it wasn't the squirrels, although I may come back to the squirrels.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Getting all dressed up, cap in hand.

Mr. Hudak: Sure; in this case, with Ottawa. All dressed up and begging for money from Ottawa after going on a spending spree. He had about \$3 billion stuffed in his pocket, a slush fund over at the Ministry of Finance, and the deficit was \$1.4 billion.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: I know my friend is very good with math. My friend from Perth-Middlesex is a wizard with math, and he would know that \$3 billion is more than \$1.4 billion. In fact, it's more than twice as much money at hand, but they chose not to balance the books and instead are intentionally running a deficit. What kind of signal does that send to Ottawa? What tremendous damage Dalton McGuinty is doing to our case on the fiscal gap by intentionally running a deficit. And he had \$3 billion that he put out there in spending as opposed to balancing the books.

Look a little bit to the east. The province of Quebec, which had nowhere near the revenue that Ontario was hiding; nowhere near it—I forget what the exact number was, but it was between \$1 billion and \$2 billion.

Mr. Miller: Did they balance the books?

Mr. Hudak: My friend from Parry Sound–Muskoka asks, “Did they balance the books?”

You’re thinking, “Well, Quebec is a smaller province than Ontario. They didn’t have the \$6 billion of increased revenue. They didn’t have the \$3-billion slush fund sitting there in the finance minister’s office.” But do you know what? Quebec balanced the budget. Quebec made the difficult but necessary decisions to make sure they worked within the finances available. They did not choose to run a deficit. They did not choose to intentionally spend so they could run a deficit. Quebec balanced the books, which I think greatly empowers their case with Ottawa because they’re making some tougher decisions, and hurts ours in comparison.

People may say, “Well, Ontario has always been the engine of growth. Surely if Ontario continues to run a deficit under Dalton McGuinty, that must be the case across provinces in this country.” The reality: Only Prince Edward Island and Ontario continue to run deficits. I bet you Prince Edward Island would be counting their lucky charms if they had an additional \$6 billion coming into the revenue base, but they do not, of course.

I have to think that Dalton McGuinty’s spending spree of a budget, hiding money in the treasury instead of reporting it properly and, third, intentionally running a deficit so that he could stay in deficit for another year, have done tremendous damage to our case.

I spoke a bit already about the drop in some of the important variables, the economic indicators for 2006; for example, GDP growth. The 2005 budget said 2.8%, the economic statement, 2.6%, and the 2006 budget, 2.3%. Exports similarly show a downward trend from the 2005 to the 2006 budget. Retail sales growth falls behind the growth rate of the other provinces. So there are across-the-board troublesome economic trends that show Ontario has lost its position as a leader in Canada or a leader in North America under Dalton McGuinty’s high-taxes, high-spending budgets.

The last point I would make is that I’m disappointed in the response of the ministry with respect to the tax breaks on dividend income. This is the issue that Ralph Goodale got in some trouble over. I understand the caution Liberals would have about another scandal—

Mr. Tascona: and Scott Brison too.

Mr. Hudak: And Scott Brison as well. You’d think we would have had a better answer from this government on how the provinces are going to address this issue. Other provinces have moved in this direction. Ontario chose not to, which shows this is a government that would rather tax and keep taxing than give any kind of break to hard-working taxpayers.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Bisson: I’ve got to say, I listened attentively to the comments from the finance critic from the Conservative Party, and I want to know what the Tories have against the army and the navy. What is it? You guys are always talking about sailors as if they are drunk or something. I take exception to that. I served in Her

Majesty’s army. I was there along with a whole bunch of people in the military, and they weren’t a bunch of drunken sailors. They worked hard. They were there serving their country, and I am mad at the Tories for alleging that they’re nothing but a bunch of drunken sailors. No, no; I’m just having some fun with you.

Listen, I understand the comment that the member is making.

Interjection.

Mr. Bisson: The squirrels I could get into, but not in the House. I’m not going down that one, all right?

I just want to say that I agree with some of the comments the member made, because it seems to me that the government had some choices to make.

I was a member of government in 1990. We came to power in the middle of what was the worst recession in probably the last 40-odd years. We were faced with having to deal with the question of what you do when you basically don’t do anything and you’ve got an \$8.5-billion deficit. That’s where we were at when we came in in 1990. I would have loved to have been part of a government that got elected and found out they had a \$3-billion surplus in one budget year.

It seems to me that some of the decisions the government made were somewhat interesting, because it’s a group of decisions that, when you take them individually, I guess, if you’re one particular stakeholder, you say, “Oh, that’s good news,” but when you start to peel away the numbers and take a look at the budget, you find out that it’s not all it’s said to be and, number two, there are a lot of contradictions within the budget itself. I’m going to have a chance to speak to that very shortly, and I know that you and everybody out there is looking forward to it, and especially the members of the government are looking forward to what I have to say on the budget in about 10 minutes.

1720

Mr. Arthurs: I’m pleased to take the opportunity to provide a couple of minutes of comments on the speech from the member from Erie–Lincoln, the critic for the official opposition. I was pleased to have him at our breakfast budget. Last Friday morning he took the time to come all the way from the southwest, Niagara, to Pickering and visit with us, which was really great.

Our plan, though, is different than their plan. Their plan was to increase spending, cut taxes and drive us into deficit, and then deny it or go into complete denial for an extended period of time. Now, they went on about that there was no deficit; there was no deficit. Finally they acknowledged the fact that they drove us into deficit. They let spending get out of control. They weren’t managing it, and they cut taxes. Well, that doesn’t work. Our plan is to create opportunity by being prudent fiscal managers.

In the time we’ve had in office—this being our third budget, but two complete budget cycles—we’ve taken that fiscal deficit and driven it down from \$5.5 billion to a far more modest \$1.4 billion, a 75% reduction in the deficit. We’re on target for 2008-09 for a balanced

budget, or a year earlier if we don't need the reserves. We have found that in 2005-06 that reserve isn't needed, so we've managed in this year to get that deficit down to \$1.4 billion.

The economy has been creating good, high-paying jobs: 200,000-plus high-paying, good jobs. We need, though, the federal government's engagement on some files if we're to close the fiscal imbalance, which will assist us. We're pleased to see that the Minister of Finance federally, Mr. Flaherty, in his discussions with our Minister of Finance has certainly, I understand, expressed some willingness to pursue the matter with him. So we believe in prudent fiscal—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Runciman: I compliment the member for Erie-Lincoln for doing an outstanding job, as usual. He certainly is a compliment to the Conservative caucus, a compliment to this assembly in the outstanding job he does not only representing his own constituency and his constituents therein but I think in raising very important issues for all of the people of the province of Ontario on a very regular basis.

I happened to be an occupant of this assembly during the Peterson government years. I was quite shocked; I didn't realize, as the member pointed out, the spending habits of the Rae government and the Peterson government. I recall the governor of the Bank of Canada during the Peterson years calling on the Liberal Peterson government to restrain its spending because it was driving up inflation in the country, because of the rapid clip of spending by the Liberal government of the day. Mr. Peterson rebuffed that. To find out today that the McGuinty government now holds the record in terms of spending increases on a year-over-year basis is quite shocking and should be disturbing to each and every member of this assembly.

One of the other elements that we've heard of recently is that as we've approached the end of the fiscal year, many of the ministries have gone on internal spending binges to ensure that they've spent their budgets. I want to take this opportunity today—anyone in the public service who is aware of this. We've heard some in the Attorney General's office: \$20 million out the window, out the door. This is the fax number: 416-325-1493. Fax the information to us. Let us know about the misuse of hard-earned taxpayer dollars by faxing 416-325-1493. Make us aware of it. We'll do something about it. We'll bring it to public light.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): That sounded like a paid political announcement, whatever it was.

I'm very pleased with the dollars we've received in Ottawa after seven or eight years of not funding programs. Public transit, which was 75% in the early 1990s, was dropped down to zero. I remember sitting on council in the city of Ottawa. When I first arrived there, we had a bus fleet which was very, very difficult to keep in repair because the municipality just could not take the down-loading that came with the Tory years in the 1990s and in the early 2000s.

I've just added up the dollars that have come to Ottawa since we became the government: The total for roads and transportation in Ottawa alone is \$468 million. These are new dollars. It was \$200 million for the north-south light rail, \$18 million in new gas tax funds last year, \$27 million this year, \$10 million in late December 2005 for help with transit funding, \$93 million announced last June for Highway 7, \$50 million announced last June for Highway 17 through Kanata. With all those and with the \$32 million just announced, this will mean that the city of Ottawa will be able to proceed with projects that are very needed, and this is what is happening right across Ontario with that \$400 million, outside of Toronto, that's being used for roads and bridges.

This budget is trying to repair that fiscal deficit of \$5.6 billion we were left, the infrastructure deficit that was created over many years by the Tories, and the health care deficit which was so important. Just in these last two years we have increased MRI numbers by 42%. That's what we're doing in this province.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Erie-Lincoln has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Hudak: I thank all my colleagues for their comments. I do have some additional facts in response to my colleagues. Nicole Goodman, an outstanding intern in my office, has been working very hard. She dug up some good facts that we have a duty to share with the Legislature.

The TD Bank Financial Group's provincial economic update forecasts that Ontario's annual GDP growth will be the second-lowest in all of Canada in 2006-07, narrowly beating New Brunswick. Scotiabank Group—

Mr. Runciman: With a balanced budget.

Mr. Hudak: And New Brunswick has a balanced budget, my colleague adds.

Scotiabank Group's provincial report says that Ontario is still in the slow lane. The report observes that Ontario's GDP is expected to further decelerate by an additional 2% in 2006, placing the province of Ontario below the national average for the fourth year in a row under Dalton McGuinty's leadership.

I talked too about the lack of accountability from the Ministry of Finance. Let me give you some other examples. I know it's not the civil servants. I know they're pushing back about this. They want accountability. They want the budget to be transparent, but the political interference from the Premier's office is preventing this. The Ministry of Finance now is no longer disclosing details like expected revenue in the medium-term fiscal plan. For example, you could always look and see what personal income tax revenue was going to be, retail sales tax, corporate tax, health premium etc. You could always see what it was planned to be in the future. No longer; we just get one group number continuing to obscure the finances of the province.

One more thing: I talked about the dividend tax credit. British Columbia and Manitoba have already committed to raise their dividend tax credit rates to align with the federal direction, but no indication from the province of Ontario.

Lastly, I want to give a plug to www.mcguintywatch.ca, our website and our newsletter that keeps track of the runaway spending.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on the budget motion. I recognize the member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Bisson: Thank you very much, Speaker. I am so delighted to be here with you today and with all my colleagues in the assembly. We'll have a chance over the next 20 minutes or so to bring a couple of issues to the floor of the assembly vis-à-vis what I think the government kind of missed when it came to how they did this budget recently.

Let's put this into context. This particular year has been a fairly good one for Ontario as far as revenue, I think we can all admit. The government made some choices, and it seems to me that the choices they made, as I said earlier, were somewhat interesting. They could have chosen to do some things that I think could have made a real difference in people's lives and how people are able to fare in this economy.

1730

Over the last couple of weeks, as did most of you, I went back to the constituency. It's what we call constituency break, where we are gone for two or three weeks, back to our riding. Like everybody here, I had an opportunity to go back and talk to local constituents in Hearst, Moosonee, Kapuskasing, Smooth Rock Falls and Timmins and other places—

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Attawapiskat.

Mr. Bisson: I didn't get to Attawapiskat. I'm sorry; I didn't get there this break. I'm going to have to do it the next time out. I did Fort Albany, I did Kash and I did Moosonee, but that's a whole other story.

Anyway, what was striking—I was commenting to my staff about it a couple of days ago, because I saw it again last week when I was in the constituency office, I believe on Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday; I forget what day I was there. I did a little bit of front desk duty. I think that's something every MPP should try to do. Now, I did it by default, because I was trying to fix some computers. I'm a bit of a computer geek, as some of you would know, and I was trying to fix some software problems we're having on our system. As a result, I was at the front desk. So the MPP is at the front desk, and everybody is going to talk to the MPP.

The thing that really struck me was the degree to which people came in and talked about issues of poverty. That really struck me, because I thought, here we are, supposedly in an economy that is doing not too badly. In the city of Timmins we are luckier than most. Yes, we have been affected negatively by what is happening in the forestry sector, but mining has done quite well. When gold and base metal prices are where they are today, it's pretty hard not to make money in the mining industry, even despite the high Canadian dollar and despite the energy prices—a pretty big issue, I think, for Kidd Creek in my riding. Even at that level, when the base metal prices and the gold metal prices are up, mining tends to

do well, and I was surprised at the degree to which people were coming into my constituency office talking about issues of poverty.

For example, I can't remember his name, and I wish I could because I've talked to this gentleman a couple of times; it just doesn't come to me. But he comes into the office and says he is on ODSP, the Ontario disability support program, and has been for about 10 years. He is unable to work because, obviously, of his medical condition. He says, "I look at what I started to receive 10 years ago on ODSP and I look at where I am today, and I've fallen back. I can't afford to make ends meet. We have kids. We decided to have a family. I got sick. The children are there, so you have to make ends meet." He came in specifically to talk about how they have fallen back on ODSP and that this particular government has not, in his opinion, kept the commitment when it comes to increases to welfare and ODSP.

In the first year, there was a 2% increase, there was none last year, and there was a 2% increase in this budget. It's better than nothing, I guess. But his point was that if you look at where he was 10 years ago compared to where he is today, he feels he's about 35% back. He says, "We are having to make decisions in our family"—it's not just this individual who told me this, but a number of other people—"about what we buy for groceries. Can we afford to buy very basic things for our family, such as milk and bread?" They are really having to penny pinch their way through the family budget.

He talked about the child tax credit, about how it is important for him that the government should not be clawing back the money he and his wife get from the federal government for their two children. As a result of his disabilities on ODSP, the provincial government takes that full amount of money back. He says, "Listen, that would go a long way. That is about \$3,500 of my family's income for the year if the government was not to claw it back." He says \$3,500 is the difference between pasta and putting maybe a little bit of chicken in it so they can have a bit more food to eat.

Those are the kinds of issues people are having to deal with. I was a bit taken aback, especially in the city of Timmins, to hear that to the degree I did. So as my leader, Howard Hampton, pointed out yesterday, and my colleague Andrea Horwath from Hamilton East pointed out today, this government had a choice. It could have said, "We are going to eliminate the clawback to the child tax credit. We are going to make sure that the dollars the federal government gives to individuals at the lowest parts of the income scale in this country are not going to be clawed back by the province of Ontario." Only the province of Ontario does that. It was started by the Conservatives under Mike Harris. We thought it was wrong then. The Liberals stood in opposition and said it was wrong then. They come to office and now they are doing nothing about it.

The interesting point is that the Minister of Finance got cornered yesterday by the media, because the media all of a sudden said, "Yeah, that isn't fair. Why is it they

haven't done something? With a \$3-billion surplus, they could have spent the \$120 million in order to give, on an annual basis, at least the money back that people are entitled to under the family tax credit." Mr. Duncan responded by saying, "Oh, we can't do everything in one shot. We're going to do it sometime later." I would have to be pretty cynical to believe that he's either spinning the media, because they've had three years to do it, or they're trying to save it for the next election. I say to people out there, it's cruel, but it's also cynical. I think it adds to the way people see politicians overall. Why is it that it takes an election year for a government to announce something they should have done in year one? The bigger question is, after the election, can people believe that the government would actually deliver?

It has not been beyond this government to announce all kinds of things when they were in opposition. I remember Dalton McGuinty, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Community and Social Services—all of them would be up in the House over and over again and berate the Conservative government of Mike Harris and Ernie Eves for not having done things like the elimination of the child tax credit, the money from the clawback, or not funding autism for kids after age six. Now from opposition to government, this government doesn't do anything.

While I'm on the issue of autism, we all have that issue. I've dealt with a whole bunch of people in my constituency—Mr. Gvozdanivic and a whole bunch of other people across the riding—who are in a situation where their kids, after age six, are not able to get the support they need. In Mr. Gvozdanivic's case—I've raised it in the Legislature before—the issue is that he is getting services from the association for community living. Their budgets are such that they can only offer limited response and, as a result, they're not getting the kind of support they need in order to care for their kids.

I had another woman, Jackie, who called me up the other day and said that her daughter, who is in need of services to stay home independently because of her condition, has had her hours cut, in her estimation, from 39 hours a month to 30 hours a month. She was saying, "I'm being told that I'm being greedy because I'm asking for housekeeping services. I don't even want housekeeping services. I'm prepared to wash the toilet, I'm prepared to wash the floors, I'm prepared to do all those things to keep my daughter at home and have her live with us independently, because she's not a young girl, she's a grown woman"—Tracey, the one who is in need of the services. "All I'm asking is that they provide her with the personal care she needs in order to help me care for my daughter."

Here she is finding again that a government agency has not had an increase in their budget in a number of years. That agency is not being mean-spirited. They're saying, "Listen, we have this amount of money. We have much more need in the community than we had years before, because people are getting older, our population is increasing"—as far as the number of people that they're caring for—"and there's not enough money to go

around." So they're having to ration services for people out of organizations like the community care access centres and all of the services they dispatch, or leave people at home.

I say to the government, like I told Jackie, the sad part is that Jackie is doing a service to the taxpayers and to the province by caring for her daughter. If she didn't do it, her daughter would be in an institution, at a much higher cost to the province. Why don't we, as a province, properly support the community agencies that provide services to people like Tracey? It's really unfair to both Tracey and her mother, Jackie, to be put in that position.

The government had a choice in this budget. The government could have said, "We recognize that community care access centres and agencies that provide support in the home to leave people home independently as long as they can have not had the increases in their budgets to adjust to what's going on in their communities. Therefore, we need to enter into a dialogue to see how much that would be by verifying numbers etc., making sure it's accountable and providing the dollars so that we can properly support people in their homes."

I tell you, we're going to be in an even worse situation as time goes on, because, as we know, the baby boomers are coming into the system. As the baby boomers come in, if we don't start dealing with this now, it's going to be a huge adjustment down the road. Instead, this government had a \$3-billion surplus and decided to do absolutely nothing about those support services that people like Tracey and Jackie need so that people can live at home independently, or people on ODSP who are just trying to make ends meet. I think there are some choices we could have made that would have made a real difference in people's lives. The government failed on that point.

I guess the disappointing part for me and for a lot of Ontarians was that they really thought that Dalton McGuinty was different. They understood that in the last election, apparently, the election was about choosing change. Here we are, three years into their mandate, and I say, "What kind of change have we gotten for Jackie or Tracey? What kind of change have we got for people on ODSP? What kind of change have we got for students who are having to pay higher tuition fees because this government is continuing down the road of deregulating tuition, such as the Tories did, and increasing tuition fees?" I say to the government, what change? This is no different. All we did is that we changed chairs on the deck of the Titanic. We had Captain Mike who used to run the show; now we've got Captain Dalton. And if you take a look at the players, the players are different on the deck, but when it comes to the services being provided, they're basically the same. So there hasn't been, in my estimation, the type of change that was needed to deal with those issues that I think people thought they were voting for in the last election.

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The other issue I want to raise is where I think you failed on the economic development front. There are basically a couple of economies in Ontario. There is the

economy in southern Ontario, which is fairly robust at times. There are problems now in the parts manufacturing industry, in paper and others in southern Ontario. But by and large, they're two different economies. There's an economy that no matter what you do is going to do well: that economy around the Golden Horseshoe. There is a certain amount of activity that's going to happen in that economy no matter what government does and no matter who the government is, because the population base is there, the transportation infrastructure is there, the market is just over the border, the other side of Windsor or whatever border crossing you happen to be at, and that economy does fairly well.

But then there's another economy. There's a rural economy within the agricultural part of this province and there's a northern economy. And those are two economies of the three, I think, in Ontario where the government has really failed miserably. You take a look at the farm community. I was just talking to some grain and oilseed producers today—Alan Renwick, I noticed, was in the Legislature this afternoon again with people from the oilseed and grain producers. The farmer I was talking to, whom I've talked to before, said he was disappointed in this budget. But he says that he's resilient. They're farmers. They've been surviving for many years, and they are going to figure out how to survive this government. But they're saying, "Listen, we're seeing farms go down one after another and families basically leaving a traditional way of life that has been part of those families for generations." And this government failed miserably.

What really frustrates me is, this government sits there and says, "Oh, well, it's the feds. We've got to get the federal government. It's bad old Stephen Harper's fault." Well, listen. You're the government of Ontario. There are things that are within your control. You do what you can do, and if the federal government won't jump onside, I'm not going to sit and wait after them. I know what that record has given the First Nations communities of northern Ontario. We've waited after the federal government for 120 years, and it's nothing but poverty and no infrastructure. If we wait for Stephen Harper or Jean Chrétien or whoever the heck it might be as the Prime Minister of Canada, we're going to be waiting until there are no more farmers in the province of Ontario, because they, quite frankly, are incapable of responding.

I think this provincial government has a responsibility to do what it can within its own means to assist the farm community. Three billion dollars: You don't think that could have done something to help the farm community? I'm not saying give them \$3 billion, but certainly you could have come some way towards meeting what they need when it comes to farm stabilization programs.

There's the forestry sector, as community after community after community has been telling you, and you guys have been tinkering at the edges. You're going to a debt-ridden industry. It's a terrible way to put it, but I look at Tembec in my backyard. The shares are trading, hovering, at about a buck, give or take 10%. They're having difficulties because of what's happening with

energy and what's happening generally within the forestry sector, and, by the way, they are heavily, heavily into debt. And this government's response is announcing two or three programs to lend them more money.

All right. I'm in debt. I owe money on my Visa, I've got line-of-credit debt and I've got a mortgage, and you come to me and say you're going to give me more? What is that going to do? It's only going to extend the bankruptcy by another year or two. We don't have to give them more loans. What we need to do is deal with the basic issues. We need to deal with energy prices. How can you run a pulp and paper mill in northern Ontario or anywhere else, like Cornwall, when we have electricity prices at what they are? You've got to deal with that. You've got to come to terms with that. Industry and others have been telling you, but you sit there and you say, "Oh, no. We're doing a great job on energy."

You deal with the core issues around fibre. Now, I'll give the government some credit. I don't want to stand here and say that they've done nothing on the fibre issue. They met partway what industry was asking for. They were asking for some relief in regard to the fibre delivery cost to the mill, and they've dealt with some of that. But it took us beating you over the head for a year and a half. Every mayor in northeastern and northwestern Ontario, every union leader, every MPP in opposition—because the government MPPs couldn't do it; their hands were tied—every citizen, every radio station, every paper, everybody, Save Our North and others—not Save Our North; I should say the strong organization—basically lobbying and lobbying.

Eventually the government said, "Whoa, we're getting beat up. We've got to do something. What do we do?" David Ramsay said, "Well, they want something on fibre costs. How much is that? That's not a big-ticket item. Let's do that."

So you picked the smallest-ticket item as a response and said, "Okay, go beg the federal government for your solution now." It's the bad old Stephen Harper government again. I'm saying that you had an opportunity.

Those economies in northern and rural Ontario are ones in which we have to do things differently. Transportation is a bigger issue. The whole issue of the labour force in there is very different. The whole makeup of the industry itself in terms of the economy is different: We can't come at it from the same responses that we do in southern Ontario. We have to respond by putting in place real programs that assist farmers in keeping themselves afloat. They're not asking for anything they're not entitled to. My Lord, look at the American agricultural industry to see to what degree it subsidizes compared to Ontario. We don't even come close. The European farm community: We don't even come close to them in the degree to which they're subsidized. We're the only country that says, "We're going to run on an unsubsidized model," while everybody else around us is subsidizing their farmers from here up the yingyang. You can't operate in that environment.

I'm saying to the government that we need to support those types of economies—the farm economy and the

northern economy—because at some point, if you don't, as we close down those towns—because that's what's going to happen—people are going to move south, and we don't want that to happen for all kinds of reasons.

You had choices in this budget. You had an opportunity to make a difference. You made some choices, some of which I can support. I think that expanding the subway system in Toronto is a great idea. We did it as a government and the Tories undid it, but we had announced it. We actually had the tunnels being built. I think they're a good investment. I don't argue with you on that.

But \$3 billion, and you couldn't find \$120 million to help people when it came to the elimination of the child tax credit? Three billion dollars, and you couldn't find money to assist families when it comes to kids with autism? Three billion dollars, and you couldn't find at least part of a solution for the farm community? Three billion dollars, and you couldn't do something for the forestry sector? You didn't even have to come close to \$1 billion on all that stuff when you add it up.

Instead, this government said, "We're going to do what's going to give us an opportunity to invest in our infrastructure," which I support and don't have a problem with. But at the end of the day they're more worried about photo ops for their cabinet ministers and backbenchers than they are about trying to find solutions. That's really what it comes down to. Everybody put their shopping list in and said, "Boy, what I need for the next election is to stand by a new subway station, or "What I need for the next election is to stand by a new bus lane somewhere in the city of Brampton or Mississauga." Great projects: I haven't got a problem with them; I support them. But, hey, there's another part of the province out there and it's a lot bigger than down here, you know. Some of you have come up to take a look at it.

The last point is the First Nations community. We've got communities like Kashechewan that don't even have a lock-up. Police can't do their jobs. They pick somebody up but they can't lock them up. There's nowhere to put them. We've got communities that don't have police cars. We have communities that don't have ambulances. We've got communities that go without the most basic of services and we couldn't do something for them?

It would be pretty hard to vote for a budget, at the end of the day, that has those types of things left out. As a New Democrat, I think it's important that we invest, as the government says, in our communities, but that we invest in those areas that I think make the biggest difference to people's lives. I think about kids with autism, I think about people who are less fortunate in our society, I think about the farm and the rural community and the northern community and I say we should have invested there.

The Acting Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): Thank you for giving me this opportunity to stand up and respond to my friend from Timmins-James Bay, who was talking about the budget. The member was talking about how he

thought that Premier McGuinty was different from many Premiers who came to the province of Ontario. I agree with him that he is different, because he understands the issues very well. When we got elected, we didn't find just one deficit. We had four deficits: a health deficit, an education deficit, a fiscal deficit and an infrastructure deficit. That's why we tackled all these issues step by step.

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It's unfair when the member from Timmins-James Bay talks about how we don't pay attention to rural Ontario. If you go to the record, since we got elected we've invested more than \$800 million in the agriculture area. I think it's very important. This year, two or three weeks ago, we announced \$125 million for rural Ontario. I agree with him that it's not enough because the issue is very important and big. I want the members from both sides, the Conservatives and the NDP, to join us and talk to the federal government to help us address this issue in detail. This issue is so big.

I also want to tell you about investments in infrastructure. It's very important. We met with the industries, the manufacturers in the province, and they told us that gridlock around the Toronto area is blocking them from making investments. That is why our investment went into transportation and the transit system, to make it easier for the many people who ride and invest money in this province, to make the manoeuvres easier. I think it's very important for the future economy in this province.

Education is very important and we tackled this issue. He is talking about high tuition. For the first time ever in this province, we put a freeze on tuition for the last two years—

The Acting Speaker: Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakubuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): I'm pleased to comment as well. This government has been going on and on about what a great job they've done in the budget. What they've done a great job of is fooling the taxpayers, or attempting to fool the taxpayers of the province of Ontario.

There is absolutely no doubt that this government could have balanced the budget this year. And there's also no doubt that they still could have funded the programs they're lauding, such as the infrastructure programs they're talking about across the province here in Ontario. They could have done that as well with any kind of prudent management and a commitment to priority spending. But what they have done is they have gone on a binge. They've gone on a spending orgy to ensure that they would have a deficit because it buffers their argument with the federal government with respect to where the province of Ontario is as opposed to the federal government and the finances of the country.

There was ample opportunity. There was no doubt that this could have easily been done. So what's happened is they have gone on this spending spree, spending your money. The hard-working people of this province, the taxpayers of Ontario, have been shafted. They could have

been given a balanced budget this year, which is exactly what the economists are expecting from an economy that is performing like Ontario's, but this government chose to ensure that there would be a deficit, when that was completely unnecessary. They talk about people wanting it both ways. They could have had that both ways; they could have funded the programs and still balanced the budget.

We're asking people out there in ministries across this province to let us know about examples of waste because we know they're out there. Please fax us at 416-325-1493. We want to get to the bottom of this. The people of Ontario deserve nothing less.

Mr. Arthurs: I'm pleased to take a moment or so in responding to the comments made by the member from Timmins-James Bay, and I'll have to repeat that so I don't get it wrong again.

I want to make a couple of comments. We had a one-time increase in revenue, and there's certainly no guarantee in any way that we can see at this point that that's going to be sustained. If you work some overtime during the year, it's kind of like one-time funding. You don't premise your expenditures on your overtime. So you don't go out and extend your house or buy a big new house with a long-term mortgage on it. You might buy the new couch that you wanted with the overtime, but you don't mortgage yourself on the overtime.

What we've done with some of the funding available—and the members from Timmins-James Bay spoke to matters such as farming. Eight hundred million dollars for income support over three years, \$125 million just a few weeks ago, is a clear indication in large dollars of our commitment to the farming community. I think it's clear that more is necessary from government generally to help the farm community, and we look forward to the federal budget that's pending to see what they're going to do to come to the table along with us.

We've heard a lot during the debate about the national child benefit supplement. Since we came to office—in 2004, 2005 and 2006—we've allowed the increases to flow through to those children and their parents. We have increased in two different budgets the support payments for those on Ontario Works and ODSP by 3% and 2%. The impact on a single-parent family with two children is that they now have some \$1,600 a year more than they did when we came to office. That's about a 15.7% increase. That's a prudent and responsible approach.

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand-Norfolk-Brant): The member for Timmins-James Bay raised a number of issues with respect to the economy of southern Ontario, in particular the farm economy, and made reference to the miserable treatment of the farm economy by this present McGuinty government. I think that as we debate this NDP budget motion, it is important to reiterate that the Ontario Minister of Finance has cut the ag budget by 21%. That scopes out at \$244 million. Last year we saw a cut. We saw a cut to the ag budget of \$167 million. A number of members opposite have made mention of the

\$125-million package, not only for cash crop but also for livestock and the horticultural sector. That \$125 million does sound impressive; I think it's very important to point out during the budget motion today that that's 52% less than what was forthcoming last year. That's 52% less for not only cash crop, but for livestock, not even to mention ginseng and so many other commodities—cull cow, beef, dairy heifer export—that received nothing.

The member for Timmins-James Bay was talking to some grain and oilseed farmers. Those farmers, as we heard from the member, were told to go to Ottawa. We realize that farmers are receiving cheques from the federal government. This was money that was originally announced last December by the federal Liberal government. Some 11,000 Ontario cash crop farmers have received their federal cheques to the tune of something like 30 million federal dollars. They're still waiting for something from the McGuinty government.

The Acting Speaker: The member for Timmins-James Bay has two minutes to reply.

Mr. Bisson: I want to thank all the members for their comments, but I'm going to focus on one because I heard a comment from the Liberal benches, a particular member—I'm not sure who it was so I'm not going to make any allegations—

Mr. Hudak: I know.

Mr. Bisson: That'll be your turn.

It was, "Tell me how we can spend more money on farmers and balance the budget." The reality is that if you invest in farmers, they're going to go out and buy—you know, they're going to be more prosperous. They're going to be buying farm equipment, they're going to be hiring people to work on their farms, and they're going to be buying supplies and services, all of which are basically activities in the rural economy that at the end of the day are going to assist the Ontario economy. That's how you make an economy grow and that was—

Mr. McNeely: Spend, spend.

Mr. Bisson: There he goes. He says, "Spend, spend," and I'm saying, yes, spend some money on the farm industry, spend some money on the forest industry in northern Ontario. At the end of the day, those are activities that are going to give you back money. If you have a prosperous and strong rural farm economy, that money is going to come back to the treasury of Ontario. If you have a strong northern economy when it comes to forestry, again that money is going to come back. I find it disheartening that members of the government would say, "Well, you tell me how I'm going to spend money on the farm community and I'm going to be able to balance the budget." That's how you make an economy grow, and I say to the government, if you don't get that, boy, are we in trouble.

The Acting Speaker: It being past 6 o'clock, this House stands adjourned until later on this evening at 6:45.

The House adjourned at 1800.

Evening meeting reported in volume B.

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Guelph-Wellington	Lalonde, Jean-Marc (L)	Niagara Falls	Craiton, Kim (L)
	Sandals, Liz (L)	Nickel Belt	Martel, Shelley (ND)

Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
Nipissing	Smith, Monique M. (L)	Stormont–Dundas– Charlottenburgh	Brownell, Jim (L)
Northumberland	Rinaldi, Lou (L)	Sudbury	Bartolucci, Hon. / L'hon. Rick (L) Minister of Northern Development and Mines / ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Oak Ridges	Klees, Frank (PC)	Thornhill	Racco, Mario G. (L)
Oakville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel (L)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Mauro, Bill (L)
Oshawa	Ouellette, Jerry J. (PC)	Thunder Bay–Superior	Gravelle, Michael (L)
Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Patten, Richard (L)	North / Thunder Bay–Superior- Nord	
Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	McGuinty, Hon. / L'hon. Dalton (L) Premier and President of the Executive Council, Minister of Research and Innovation / premier ministre et président du Conseil exécutif, ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation	Timiskaming–Cochrane	Ramsay, Hon. / L'hon. David (L) Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for Aboriginal Affairs / ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones
Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Watson, Hon. / L'hon. Jim (L) Minister of Health Promotion / ministre de la Promotion de la santé	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins-Baie James	Bisson, Gilles (ND)
Ottawa–Orléans	McNeely, Phil (L)	Toronto Centre–Rosedale / Toronto-Centre–Rosedale	Smitherman, Hon. / L'hon. George (L) Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Ottawa–Vanier	Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (L) Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs / ministre de la Culture, ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones	Trinity–Spadina	Marchese, Rosario (ND)
Oxford	Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Vaughan–King–Aurora	Sorbara, Greg (L)
Parkdale–High Park	Kennedy, Hon. / L'hon. Gerard (L) Minister of Education / ministre de l'Éducation	Waterloo–Wellington	Arnott, Ted (PC) First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier Vice-Président du Comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Parry Sound–Muskoka	Miller, Norm (PC)	Willowdale	Zimmer, David (L)
Perth–Middlesex	Wilkinson, John (L)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	Pupatello, Hon. / L'hon. Sandra (L) Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues / ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires, ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
Peterborough	Leal, Jeff (L)	Windsor–St. Clair	Duncan, Hon. / L'hon. Dwight (L) Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet / ministre des Finances, président du Conseil de gestion du gouvernement
Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge	Arthurs, Wayne (L)	York Centre / York-Centre	Kwinter, Hon. / L'hon. Monte (L) Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Prince Edward–Hastings	Parsons, Ernie (L)	York North / York-Nord	Munro, Julia (PC)
Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke	Yakabuski, John (PC)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Cordiano, Hon. / L'hon. Joseph (L) Minister of Economic Development and Trade / ministre du Développement économique et du Commerce
Sarnia–Lambton	Di Cocco, Caroline (L)	York West / York-Ouest	Sergio, Mario (L)
Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Nepean–Carleton	Vacant
Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Duguid, Brad (L)	Toronto–Danforth	Vacant
Scarborough East / Scarborough-Est	Chambers, Hon. / L'hon. Mary Anne V. (L) Minister of Children and Youth Services / ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse	Whitby–Ajax	Vacant
Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	Berardinetti, Lorenzo (L)		
Scarborough–Agincourt	Phillips, Hon. / L'hon. Gerry (L) Minister of Government Services / ministre des Services gouvernementaux		
Scarborough–Rouge River	Balkissoon, Bas (L)		
Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Dunlop, Garfield (PC)		
Simcoe–Grey	Wilson, Jim (PC)		
St. Catharines	Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (L) Minister of Tourism, minister responsible for seniors, Government House Leader / ministre du Tourisme, ministre délégué aux Affaires des personnes âgées, leader parlementaire du gouvernement		
St. Paul's	Bryant, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (L) Attorney General / procureur général		
Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

A list arranged by members' surnames and including all responsibilities of each member appears in the first and last issues of each session and on the first Monday of each month.

Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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N° 50B

No. 50B

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 28 March 2006

Mardi 28 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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Hansard Reporting and Interpretation Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 28 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 28 mars 2006

The House met at 1845.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting the consideration of concurrences and the Supply Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Finance is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion. Is there such consent? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I move that notwithstanding any standing order, the orders for concurrence in supply for the Ministries of Agriculture and Food, Citizenship and Immigration, Health and Long-Term Care, and Transportation, and order G82, second reading of Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, may be called concurrently; and

That when such orders are called, they shall be considered concurrently in a single debate; and

That the time available to 9:20 p.m. this evening shall be divided equally among the recognized parties; and

That at the conclusion of the debate the Speaker shall put every question necessary to dispose of the order for concurrence in supply for each of the ministries named above, and to dispose of all remaining stages of Bill 82; and

If a recorded vote is requested by five members, all divisions shall be stacked, and there shall be a single 10-minute division bell.

The Acting Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

CONCURRENCE IN SUPPLY ADOPTION DES CRÉDITS

SUPPLY ACT, 2006 LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2006

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): I move concurrence in supply for the following ministries: Agriculture

and Food, Citizenship and Immigration, Health and Long-Term Care, and Transportation, and I move second reading of Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I look to the Minister of Finance to lead off the debate.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: I'm proud today to rise and speak to Bill 82, the Supply Act, a very important piece of legislation. I will be sharing my time with my parliamentary assistant, the member for Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge.

Passage of the Supply Act constitutes the statutory authorization by the Legislature of the government's expenditures for the fiscal year. As such, it has far-reaching implications for the people of this province. The Supply Act gives the government the authority to implement its program, continue fulfilling its commitment, and put its vision into practice. Without it, the government would be unable to continue implementing the mandate that was given by the people. Without it, the political process would be meaningless.

The Supply Act, 2006, provides the legislative authority for the spending from the estimates and supplementary estimates, which have been put before this House. Without spending authority, the government would be unable to make most scheduled and unscheduled payments: Nursing homes cannot be paid; hospitals cannot be paid; doctors cannot be paid; municipalities cannot be paid; general welfare recipients cannot be paid; children's aid societies cannot be paid; suppliers' accounts cannot be paid. In other words, without this act, our government would be unable to fulfill the mandate for which we are responsible to the people of this great province.

Last week, it was my honour to present our government's third budget. As you'll recall, in the 2004 and 2005 budgets, we made historic investments in health care, education, post-secondary education and a stronger economy. The 2006 budget continues the focus on health, education and post-secondary education while building a stronger economy through investments in infrastructure.

1850

Let me put this in context. When we introduced our first budget in 2004, we laid out for debate and consideration our government's four-year plan for the province. Our 2006 budget is the third part of this plan to invest in health and education, to restore the province's finances and to position Ontario for growth today and

tomorrow. We are investing in people and the things that matter most to them. We are investing in roads, bridges and transit that help keep our people and goods moving. We are strengthening Ontario's economic advantage by creating a climate for job creation now and in the future. Unlike the opposition, we have a plan. Our plan is balanced and responsible. Our plan puts people first. Our plan is the right plan for Ontario.

You've heard us say that our province's greatest competitive advantage is our people. Strengthening that advantage is what our plan for Ontario is all about. Since being elected three years ago, we have set out a comprehensive plan to transform health care, education, the economy and indeed the business of government itself. We committed ourselves then, and remain committed today, to a new era of openness and transparency in government, to renewed investment in essential public services, to restore the province's financial health and to stimulate a new generation of economic growth. Our plan is on track; our plan is working. We remain on track to eliminate the deficit we inherited from the previous government while continuing to make essential investments in education, health and a strong economy.

In 2005, the Ontario economy outperformed the average private sector and government projections, resulting in unexpected additional revenue. We've made a strategic and prudent choice to invest 60% of this additional money to pay down Ontario's infrastructure deficit. Our government is on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit no later than 2008-09, and a balanced budget will be achieved a year earlier, in 2007-08, if the reserve is not required. Despite this rosy picture, we will continue to be prudent, focused and disciplined in our approach to our fiscal management.

While we are optimistic about Ontario's economic growth, it's important to remember that we face challenges and risks beyond our control, including growth in the US economy, the strong Canadian dollar and higher world oil prices. We will do our part to ensure the economy can withstand these external factors by anticipating challenges and prudently managing our finances.

But we have to continue planning for the medium and longer terms, and to that effect our government will continue to strengthen the economy through investments in post-secondary education, infrastructure, research and development, and key economic sectors including: a continued focus on education and training by government and business; better integration of new Canadians into the economy, particularly in high-skill, high-wage jobs; increasing research and innovation capacity; investing in infrastructure; a reliable, sustainable electricity supply; investing in a healthy business environment; ongoing fiscal discipline; and managing health care costs.

We are encouraging economic growth, restoring fiscal health, investing in education and improving health care. We are doing it by investing in people, and with the passage of the Supply Act, we will be able to continue to deliver what we have set out to do in our budget. The list of these investments in the people of our province is

impressive, and as a government we continue to add to that list, and have continued that tradition of investing in our people with last week's budget.

Investing in health care is one of the McGuinty government's top priorities. The government is building opportunities for Ontarians to achieve better health through new programs to promote health and prevent illness, better access to doctors and nurses and shorter wait times for key services.

The 2006 Ontario budget:

- invests an additional \$1.9 billion in health in 2006-07, including increasing the number of family health teams and reducing wait times;

- provides \$12 million in 2006-07, growing to \$30 million in 2008-09, to fund the purchase of insulin pumps and related supplies for 6,500 children with type 1 diabetes;

- expands breast screening for women between 50 and 74;

- invests \$7 million annually to enhance the newborn screening program, which includes the creation of a new state-of-the-art screening facility at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario;

- supports the Ontario health plan for an influenza pandemic, increasing the government's stockpile of antivirals and emergency supplies and equipment to protect health care workers and their patients.

We are also providing funding for additional cancer surgery, cardiac procedures, cataract surgery, hip and knee replacements and MRI procedures in order to further improve wait times. The government has already funded 31,000 more cardiac, cancer and cataract surgeries, and hip and knee replacements, since 2004-05. The number of MRI exams has increased by 42% since 2003-04, and we've reduced the wait time for elective cardiac bypass surgery from 30 to 15 days and for radiation treatment by more than a week.

In our last budget we announced Reaching Higher, an historic \$6.2-billion cumulative investment in post-secondary education by 2009-10 to improve access, quality and accountability. This budget's investments in post-secondary education will:

- increase access to upfront tuition grants for middle-income families by more than doubling the income threshold for a two-child family, from about \$35,000 to \$75,000;

- almost double the number of students receiving upfront grants in 2006-07, to nearly 60,000 students, up from 32,000 students in 2005-06;

- ease student debt by ensuring it is limited to \$7,000 per completed year;

- cover the actual cost of books and supplies for 75% of all student aid recipients. This is the first increase in allowances for books and supplies since the mid-1980s.

Finally, this budget would increase grants for student-needs funding to school boards by more than \$400 million from the previous year to \$17.3 billion in the 2006-07 school year.

Our objective remains to improve services Ontarians value and make our economy competitive. We continue to work on modernizing government and have an in-depth modernization project under way. This is about more than finding savings and moving money from lower-priority to higher-priority areas. It is about providing higher-quality public services, public services that need the funds set out for them here in the Supply Act. Modernizing government is also a critical step to improve our finances, and improving our finances is a critical component of building a stronger economy.

A key element of our strategy for strengthening the Ontario economy is maintaining a competitive tax and business environment to encourage investment growth. In the 2006 budget, we proposed to accelerate the capital tax rate. Effective January 1, 2007, the current rate would be cut by 5%, a full two years earlier than currently scheduled.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Good news for the business community.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: It's very good news for the businessman and businesswoman. We intend to fully eliminate this tax in 2010 should the fiscal position of the province allow.

Difficult choices lie ahead, but we will be focused and disciplined in making them so that we can achieve our objectives for the economy, our financial situation, education and health care. We will continue to provide updates on our progress.

I am proud of what we have accomplished so far. I'm excited about our plan for the future, because ultimately it's a plan that will strengthen the prosperity of our people, the health of our people and the education and skills of our people. Moving forward, we will continue to be focused and disciplined in our management of the province's finances and continue striving towards our goal of making Ontario the North American leader in the management and delivery of public services.

Passage of the Supply Act is fundamental in order to fulfill our plan for this great province. I ask members of the House to dedicate due consideration to Bill 82 and vote in favour of its passage.

1900

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): It's my pleasure to join the debate on Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006. What we heard from the Minister of Finance was about 13 seconds on Bill 82, and then a long dissertation on what he considers a wonderful budget for the people of Ontario.

On this side of the House we disagree. We disagree with that contention on the part of the Minister of Finance. In fact, we think there has been a bit of an attempt to fool the people of Ontario into thinking that the finances of the province require a deficit budget, when everyone on this side of the House and on that side of House, and everyone who is working in the financial markets in this province, knows that this government

could have, should have but didn't balance the budget for this upcoming fiscal year. Shame on them. They could have balanced the budget and still had the money for all the programs they've been tooting their horn about over the last couple of days with regard to spending initiatives in Ontario. They could have done that, but they chose not to balance this budget, and I say shame on them.

We're getting less, we're paying more, and that seems to be the mantra of this Liberal government, which was the same mantra as the last Liberal government's: to have power here in the province of Ontario. We all recall what kind of a mess they created.

As a member of a rural Ontario riding I'm very, very disappointed in this budget. I would classify this budget as a "buy Toronto" budget—not "by Toronto" but "buy Toronto"—because that's exactly what this government has tried to do: They have tried to buy the people in the city of Toronto to try to convince them to support them in the next election. This is a pre-election budget. Let's make no mistake about it. They have not only done that, but they have tried to buffet their position with regard to the federal government by creating a deficit when one was not necessary, because how do you go to your upper level of government with hat in hand, crying poor, when in fact your books are balanced—and well they should be. The financial markets in this province are dismayed that this government had the opportunity, tremendous revenue increases available to them, and they chose to create a deficit that is a tax on your children and my children and all children in Ontario. Shame on them.

Let me go back to rural Ontario. There were some opportunities for this government to show in this budget that they actually care about rural Ontario. We're not talking about some one-time funding that they are throwing out there. They're asking for sustainable funding. They're asking, "What about our fair share of the gas tax in this province?" They asked that at ROMA too. I could certainly point that out to the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Energy, the member from Peterborough, who seems to be talking quite a bit from his seat tonight. But they asked for that at ROMA. Where is the response of this government? This was an opportunity. The revenue was there. Those people in rural Ontario have a right to a fair share of the gas tax that they are paying. They are asking for that. In fact, as you know, I presented a bill which has passed second reading in this House, and it is up to this government to show some fairness and some compassion and some caring for people in rural Ontario to bring that bill to the floor of this House for a third reading debate. That is something that should be done.

I think another thing that this government should have looked at with their revenues is the water systems in small rural communities. I know the program is that they've got to cover themselves; it's got to be on a cost-recovery basis for those rural systems. But in the small systems, like in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke, such as in the village of Barry's Bay or Killaloe or Deep River or Renfrew or Eganville, they

simply cannot absorb all of the costs of upgrading those systems to the levels that are mandated by provincial legislation. They can't do it themselves. Even when there is a program, whether it be OSTAR, the old program, or a COMRIF program, which shares the costing of those programs among the three levels of government, even at one third, they cannot afford to cover those costs. There were some opportunities in this budget to show some real interest in helping people in rural Ontario. Those upgrades to those systems are mandated by the province. The municipalities have nothing to say about it. They don't determine what they have to do; they are told what to do. Then they are left holding the bill and having to pay the bill when those upgrades are completed. We certainly have a funding issue with regard to some old OSTAR-approved grants as well.

What about rural farmers? What about farmers in this province? I guess that's an oxymoron, "rural farmers"—I guess they are all rural. What did this government do to support farmers in my riding or elsewhere in rural Ontario? They have done very little, but they've been doing very little since they took office here in October 2003. So on and on again, on and on and over and over again, what I see from this government is that it is urban-centric, only concerned with spending billions of dollars in the GTA to try to buy and curry the favour of those voters. And I put to you, Mr. Speaker, that even those people who live and work in the GTA have a greater sense of fairness than this government. They understand the realities of rural Ontario and they understand the challenges, but I think what this government wants to do is to drive people out of rural Ontario. That's what it wants to do. It wants to drive them out of their homes and off their land in rural Ontario and force them to re-establish themselves in the cities.

Well, the rural way of life is one that is more than worth preserving. It is one that people have fought for. It is one that they have made tremendous sacrifices for. It is one that they will continue to fight for as the days go on. But they will have to fight harder with the leadership that we have in Toronto today, because this government is not doing anything to help rural people in the province of Ontario.

I'm not going to use all 50 minutes, I understand, but again I would ask them to take this opportunity—

Interjections.

Mr. Yakabuski: I don't want everybody clapping at the same time. There is an opportunity here. There is an opportunity to rethink some of these decisions that have been made. Give rural people some feeling, some idea, that this government has a certain amount of concern for their issues.

The gas tax would be a good place to start. As a matter of fact, the amount being paid to cities is going up in October. Rural people will still be paying that tax. In fact, they pay a disproportionate share of that tax. This government has an opportunity to show fairness. I would submit to them that this is a golden opportunity to do just that.

When I put this government in context in total, it's a sham. It is not an honest accounting of the position of the province of Ontario. It is an invented deficit for political purposes, and political purposes alone.

1910

The Acting Speaker: Further debate on the finance motion?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I just wanted to add a few comments and speak briefly to Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006, otherwise known as the supply bill.

I wanted to congratulate the finance minister, the PA and all those involved in the budget process for this year and for last year, because we're finally starting to turn around something that we inherited when we came to office about two years ago. The \$5.6-billion deficit we inherited is being lowered, and it's being lowered dramatically. We're now moving to the point where the projected deficit will be \$1.4 billion, and that's 75% lower than the deficit we inherited and \$200 million less than last year. We're on line to balance the budget in 2008-09, or a year earlier if the reserve is not required in 2007-08. We have created a situation where we're not going to have any more deficits and where we will not be able to hide a deficit either, because we've passed legislation, as you know, to not allow future deficits to be hidden or carried through an election time. We're moving in the right direction, and it's taking a lot of time and effort.

I just wanted to comment briefly on some of the good news that came out of last Thursday's budget. One of the big areas I'm really pleased with, and I think the people in Scarborough Southwest are happy about, is infrastructure investment. The Move Ontario program is a \$1.2-billion investment in public transit, municipal roads and bridges. This is quite significant. One thing that I've noticed year after year here in Toronto and throughout the GTA and the Golden Horseshoe area is that more and more fog days are being declared—smog days, actually. It looks like fog but it's actually smog every summer, and it's affecting people's health, as well as the health of young children more and more each year as the levels of asthma in young children continue to rise. We've got to get vehicles, especially cars, trucks and other automobiles, off the roads whenever possible. To do that, we've got to create a proper public transit system—a proper subway and bus system—and fast-moving roadways so that cars are not idling and creating the majority of the smog, which seems to sit, particularly on hot, humid days, here in Toronto.

Putting \$1.2 billion into public transit, municipal roads and bridges is quite substantial, and I couldn't be happier. I know that some people in Scarborough said, "When is this subway coming out further along the Sheppard line?" I'm happy to say that this budget contains money to look at and to spend on an environmental assessment, which is crucial if we're going to eventually build that subway and perhaps extend the Sheppard subway to the Scarborough

Civic Centre. Perhaps we could also look at the rapid transit system, which is at Kennedy subway station, being converted into something different, perhaps even a subway system that would go from Kennedy up to the Scarborough Civic Centre. That, of course, is subject to environmental assessment and consultation with the community in that area.

Creating more of a circle or a complete transit connection in Scarborough, especially along the Sheppard line, is something I'd like to see and I think the people of Scarborough would like to see as well. It would get cars off the road. What happens inevitably is that people who need to get downtown or across town will end up buying or leasing an automobile to move daily across the city, because the transit system is not fast enough or it doesn't have enough service or it's not working late in the evening or early in the morning or actually is non-existent in some areas, especially in the northeast parts of Scarborough where we've had more and more development and growth in new residential areas but not the transit to match it.

We've seen in Scarborough Southwest as well where large areas around Warden subway and even around Victoria Park subway are being redeveloped. We have a huge Warden corridor land development study, which is going to bring in thousands of new residential units and thousands of new residents living in Scarborough Southwest, and they need to move around. We just can't have every single person or every single family moving around in automobiles, because the city will end up becoming more and more congested and more and more clogged up.

I am happy that we're looking at improving the transportation system here and looking at the infrastructure. Every successful city, whether it be in North America or in the world, from London to New York to any other major city in the world, even Beijing now, is developing significant infrastructure, or has developed significant infrastructure for transportation and for moving people across their cities, across their regions. This budget really addresses that issue.

I know that my other colleagues will be speaking to this budget as well today and some of the other aspects of it. Very briefly, I just also want to say that we're investing money in education. We're committed to reaching our goals there, especially with capping the class sizes from junior kindergarten to grade 3, for smaller class sizes; putting money into health care; to help at-risk youth, and vulnerable adults and families; working on a competitive tax and business environment. These are all positive things that will sustain a healthy economic environment and an environment where people will want to live and raise their families in Ontario. I'm pleased to be part of this budget and pleased to be part of this debate here tonight.

The bill before us today allows expenditures for the fiscal year which ends this Friday, March 31, allows some of the announcements that were made this year and the budget that was put forward last year, as well as the

announcements for the budget this year, to be implemented and put into effect. I'm happy to see that and to see this government fulfill its promises that it made in 2003 and to see them fulfilled to their completion.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford):

I'm certainly pleased to join in the debate on the supply motion and concurrences. Certainly, this is a difficult issue in terms of dealing with the finances of the province and the disproportionate allocation by the government with respect to where they decided to put the moneys geographically. We're very in need: Barrie, the fastest-growing city in the province, and Simcoe county, one of the fastest-growing areas in all of this province, if not the country; and the infrastructure needs that we have with respect to transportation, water, sewage and dealing with social services are tremendous, and the growth that we have had over the years. Yet in this budget our area is not addressed adequately and certainly we're very surprised to see that there was no money put into the transportation sector from Highway 9 up north to Parry Sound-Muskoka.

You would think in an area that is growing the way it is, with the commuting traffic, they would have at least looked at the 400 expansion to ensure that there is a way to deal with the commuter traffic and also looked at GO Transit for the city of Barrie and put it in this fiscal year to make it happen for the GO Transit system for Bradford-West Gwillimbury to Barrie. That's an area that I've been working on since I was elected as a member back in 1995: to return GO Transit to the city of Barrie, which was taken away in 1992 by the NDP government at that time. The track is there. The support is in the community to make sure that commuting and using the GO Transit system is there. It's something that we're going to continue to fight for because it's something that should happen sooner rather than later. The city of Barrie is very anxious for that to happen. They do own the track and there has to be a deal made with the province for that to happen. I know that the federal government is on side. The deal has been signed and the money is there from the federal government to make sure that GO Transit comes to the city of Barrie. The problem is the provincial government, in terms of making sure that they get there in making the deal with the city for there to be a GO Transit system in Barrie. That's something I was very disappointed to see wasn't in this budget for the 2006-07 year. We're going to continue to work on that and impress on the government that it is necessary, from an environmental point of view and from a point of view of dealing with commuter traffic, to get that done.

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I want to deal with one other aspect of the supply motion and Bill 82, and also the budget that was brought down by the government. What we have here is a deficit by political convenience. I remember back in 2003 when we had the election. When it took place, it was midway through our fiscal year. On the books at that time there was a deficit, but certainly we had balanced the budget

for five consecutive years, and I'm confident that we would have balanced that budget by the end of that fiscal year back in 2003-04.

What we have here is a government that has basically been saying, "We don't have any money. There's a deficit." Yet this year they could have balanced the books. They were in a position to very easily do that because of the way the economy has been going, yet they decided to spend the money and have a deficit by political convenience.

I remember the article written by Ian Urquhart in the *Star* last week with respect to the Liberal budgetary policies. He quite candidly spoke that the Liberals didn't need to bring in the health care tax. They had the funding that was necessary to make sure the shortfall they might have had with respect to health care was in the economy and there wouldn't be any financial shortfall. Yet what we have is that the Liberals brought in the biggest tax increase in the history of this province, broke a promise with respect to what they pledged during the election, that they wouldn't increase taxes, and they brought in a health care tax that not only punishes everyone in this province who needs to use health care but certainly the people who are vulnerable, the people who are poor. The way this tax is set up is very regressive. It's something we've indicated we would get rid of because, let's face it, with the economies of this province, we don't need that health care tax.

The ironic part of this is that in 1989 it was the Liberal government under David Peterson that got rid of the health care tax at that particular time as we knew it. In the *Hansard* at that time, basically what the Minister of Finance, Bob Nixon, was saying was that it wasn't necessary and it was a punitive tax on the public. Yet we have Dalton McGuinty bringing it back in, the first major promise that he breaks, increasing taxes with respect to health care. We find ourselves in the fiscal year 2006-07 and they have the money to make sure that they would have balanced books, but they choose not to balance the books; they choose to spend it elsewhere and we are still left with the health care tax, which is a punishment on this province.

One aspect of the budget that I was pleased with, because I supported Bill 15 with respect to having insulin pumps for children covered by OHIP, was to see that that was in the budget. We were in the Legislature and we debated that. Certainly there was full support in the Legislature for that particular bill, and now it has become reality.

One other aspect I want to comment on is the RVH expansion in my riding, which I questioned the minister on last week. Quite frankly, the fundraising in the community is on track to be all raised in 2006. The RVH expansion for our area is needed now. It's not needed in 2008, that wait in terms of construction, which is when the government has indicated it would come on. The RVH expansion includes all kinds of new services which would expand the hospital beds in excess of 500, and we would have a cancer care centre. The hospital is bursting

at the seams because of the population growth and the needs in the area, yet what we see is this government deciding to come out with other hospital projects which may not have had full community support and saying, "These are the ones that are going to go forth to tender in 2006-07." That may not be the case. They may not be in a position to tender. That's what the government is speculating at this time with respect to those 13 projects.

I questioned the minister last week, on March 23. My question to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care was, "Royal Victoria Hospital's phase 1 redevelopment project includes expansions to the emergency department, diagnostic imaging, additional in-patient beds and construction of the 73,000-square-foot cancer centre, featuring three radiation therapy suites, with construction scheduled to start in 2008." He wrote a letter to the chair of RVH, dated February 8, 2006, which indicated: "The project will be subject to the legislative appropriation and all applicable approvals of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care." I asked the minister to be more specific as to what he meant by "legislative appropriation" and "ministry approvals." The legislative appropriation is the funding that needs to be in place in the budget year for that project to happen, and that project isn't scheduled to happen with respect to getting that funding until 2008-09. What I asked him is, if we're in a position to build and we're in a position to have the community funding in place, why can't we do that during fiscal year 2006-07? The minister could make that happen, because the funding is in place with respect to hospital expansions in this particular budget.

I also asked him a question about the RVH expansion. "The RVH expansion and Cancer Care project has received, as you know, because you've been in the riding, unparalleled support from the community. The community financial support for the funding of this project is on track to be met in 2006—this year. The Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, in its press release of September 2005, states, 'Construction is scheduled to start in 2008,' which I interpret to mean shovel in the ground. Given that the community financial support will be met this year, would the minister commit to considering having construction begin prior to 2008, and if not, why not?" Well, the minister wouldn't commit to that, but I would say to the minister that this is something that our community is going to continue to fight for. We think it's very important for us to have the best health care services that we can in our community now, as opposed to waiting another two years.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to join the discussion tonight on the supply motion. I'm especially pleased to have the opportunity tonight to speak about some of the ways that Mississauga is a stronger and more progressive city through the recent measures announced in Ontario's 2006-07 budget.

What does this budget mean to us in Mississauga? All of us in the western end of the city are all too familiar with the waits that we've encountered at the Credit Valley Hospital over the last several years. It's one of the

things that I heard most often during the election. People would say, especially those of us who live west of Winston Churchill, "Credit Valley is an excellent hospital, first-rate facilities, tremendous staff. We don't go there." I said, "Well, okay, I'm following you all the way along the line. Where did we drop off at the end of the table?" They'd say, "Well, you know, wait times and so on and so forth."

Our hospital opened some 21 years ago, and in 1985 it had 365 beds. Since then, Mississauga's population has nearly tripled, with most of that growth coming in Credit Valley's catchment area in my home in western Mississauga—that and eastern Oakville. Today, in 2006, the Credit Valley Hospital still only has 365 beds, but that's about to change, and it's about to change just in time for all of us who depend on Credit Valley's quality people and world-class health care. That's the health care provided by our friends and our families and our neighbours who manage and staff Credit Valley and care for our friends and families and neighbours who depend on them to work at Credit Valley.

The construction cranes that frame the new Carlo Fidani Peel Region Cancer Centre on Erin Mills Parkway have only recently come down, as our region's cancer patients can now receive treatment closer to home. But those cranes will begin to go up again in 2007 as Credit Valley starts construction on phase 2, a new extension that will add some 270,000 square feet of space to our hospital and, most importantly, about 140 precious new beds, the first expansion in 21 years. Our hospital's maternity suite was built to handle some 2,700 births per year. Last year, it handled more than 5,000. We need space. This is public infrastructure that we need, and this is the need that our budget addresses in health care facilities here in Mississauga.

Credit Valley needs to hustle to update its quotations and issue request for proposal documents, but they'll do it on time. They've always done it on time; they've always brought their projects in on time and on budget. Phase 2 of that project will be underway next year.

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The reason that Credit Valley Hospital and Trillium Health Centre in eastern Mississauga are expanding to meet our community's demands is because the government of Ontario recognizes that our health care infrastructure needs an ongoing investment to meet our growing needs. This budget shows that the government has heard the message, that the government understands Mississauga and that it has invested wisely in health care.

Health care was one of the four deficits our government inherited. We addressed that health care deficit in the 2004-05 budget. We inherited an education deficit and addressed that in last year's budget. This year's budget addresses a critical, key infrastructure deficit that's so important to us in Mississauga. We can expect the next budget to address Ontario's fiscal deficit.

Last year, the government of Ontario made the largest investment in post-secondary education in more than a generation: some \$6.2 billion to refurbish and expand the

ability of Ontarians to hold the knowledge-intensive trades, professions and occupations that are now driving prosperity in the 21st century. What that means in western Mississauga is that the University of Toronto at Mississauga will gain the ability to train some of the doctors that Ontario needs so badly.

Complementing UTM's new ability to train doctors will be Credit Valley Hospital's new status as a teaching hospital. For all of those foreign-trained medical professionals, we'll be able to certify you; we'll be able to get you working. For the Ontarians who say, "We don't have access to a family doctor," you will be able to have access to more family doctors. That has been done because of the infrastructure investment that this government made last year, this year and will make next year. This 2006-07 budget makes that possible. That's what the growing neighbourhoods of Churchill Meadows and Lisgar need; that's what the established communities of Meadowvale, Streetsville and Erin Mills need.

The other important need that Mississauga has is transportation. We need to get our supplies from where our suppliers are to the plants where we work, where those supplies are consumed. Our plants, like Pride Pak, for example, in Erin Mills, need to quickly ship their products. In Pride Pak's case, those products are packaged vegetable products, like individual servings of vegetables and fruits.

Mr. Leal: Just in time.

Mr. Delaney: We've got to get them just in time to where they're sold and, in Pride Pak's case, that's supermarkets all across eastern North America. They can outcompete US chains in the US market, buying Canadian products from farms in Ontario and processing them in Mississauga. That's what we need. That's why our government invested in infrastructure. That's the benefit in Mississauga. We need to get those products not merely into supermarkets in the United States, we need to get them to Pride Pak's customers in restaurant chains and hotels all the way across Canada.

Pride Pak needs effective public transit to help their workers get from where they live to where they work and home again. There's another need close to home for me. In the densely populated neighbourhoods of Lisgar and Churchill Meadows, in Meadowvale and in central Erin Mills, those of us who depend on the GO Train to get us from where we live to where we work—in many cases, in downtown Toronto—those of us who get on the GO Train at Meadowvale, Streetsville and at Erindale run into the problem of commuting to commute, those gridlocked, east-to-west traffic jams in the morning and in the evening. The last train out is at 8:10 in the morning from Meadowvale and the first train back leaves Union Station at 4:30.

People are very clear: We've got to do more; we've got to do better in public transit. That's why last year our government announced a brand new GO Train station, the first GO Train station in 25 years in Mississauga, and it'll be built in Lisgar between Milton and Meadowvale. It'll be built right where people need to get on the train.

Instead of that traffic going from west to east in the morning, now it can go north. We can drive north along Ninth Line, Tenth Line and we can drive north along Winston Churchill and we'll be able to park upwards of 750 cars in the New Lisgar GO Train station, which gets under construction this year. That's because of the investments our government has made in public infrastructure.

Mr. Leal: You've been waiting 25 years for that?

Mr. Delaney: Twenty-five years we have waited for the first new GO train station, and that's the response of the government.

GO trains are all crowded, and even GO Transit has freely admitted that if it had more trains, it could fill them all. They're all filled. At the moment, we all know that there are 10 cars on a GO train, but soon there are going to be 12. From the very outset, Lisgar will be designed for 12 cars.

This year GO Transit is spending some money on an environmental assessment to do something that Mississauga has needed for a long time: a third track on the Milton line, which is going to enable all-day GO service once we get that third track built. I've taken that GO train and sat there on both sides of the train and watched as we've gone. We need to upgrade some of the bridges in order to build that third track, and that environmental assessment will tell us which bridges we need to upgrade. So we'll do it. We know that we even need to upgrade that big span over the Humber River. The tracks are owned by CP Rail. That third track will enable people to go in to Toronto after 8 o'clock in the morning and enable them to get home from Toronto before 4:30 in the afternoon.

As I'm speaking in this place, I'd like to thank our ward 9 councillor, Pat Saito, for all the work she's done on keeping that issue of the new GO train station at Lisgar and the need for the third track front and centre in our area in western Mississauga. I also want to thank all the people who last year signed the petitions we read in this Legislature over and over again. I can't say enough about my colleagues from Mississauga: Tim Peterson from Mississauga South; Peter Fonseca from Mississauga East; Vic Dhillon from Brampton West–Mississauga; Kuldip Kular from Bramalea–Gore–Malton–Springdale; and a special thanks to my colleague Jeff Leal from Peterborough, who must have read that petition almost as often as I did, and of course to our Minister of Transportation and highways, Harinder Takhar, whose ministry approved the project and who stood with me last January when we announced it.

That's local infrastructure. That's the kind of investment we're making. What difference is that making in Mississauga? Well, let me quote to you some of the thoughts of Mississauga's first citizen, our mayor, Hazel McCallion, who was asked on budget day, what did she think of the budget? Let's use her words exactly: "The message I got today is that this government is determined to try and help the municipalities. They're not going to do it overnight. They can't, because the downloading we've experienced is of such an enormous figure that it

will take us years to offset the downloading that the previous government loaded on us."

Mr. Leal: Who downloaded it?

Mr. Delaney: The Tories downloaded it.

So the whole message of the budget, in my opinion, was to upload or off-load—one or the other; whatever you call it—load the property tax. I think the whole budget seems to have that message. It was a very positive budget, extremely positive. Today was a good day for Ontario, in my opinion. It's a step in the right direction.

That's some of the impact this budget has made to Mississauga. That's why I'm proud to stand in this Legislature and support it.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): I appreciate the opportunity to provide my input on this government's approach to money. This supply and concurrences debate nicely coincides with another major money-oriented issue, the provincial budget. We received the budget just last week. I'd like to focus on some of the harm that farmers are feeling as a direct result of this government's approach to the management of money and the lack thereof.

Before this government starts crafting its budget, I really think it should begin with some basics: take a look at a calculator, for example, and check the numbers. If I crunch the numbers on my own calculator, you start out with \$1.14 billion and subtract \$244 million, as we know. Just so that everybody in this House knows what I'm talking about, that's the extent of this government's reduction to agriculture spending in the province of Ontario. It works out to be a cut of 21%.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): That is so irresponsible.

Mr. Barrett: I will repeat: a 21% reduction in the agriculture budget in the province of Ontario. If any members opposite need help with those numbers, I can show them some of the numbers—

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: You need help.

The Acting Speaker: I'll start by asking all members of this House to come to order, and return to the member for Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant.

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Mr. Barrett: Thank you, Speaker.

These cuts are in addition to the \$167 million that was slashed last year. Again, I'm referring to Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture budget, one of the ministries that we are dealing with tonight as we deal with the debate on supply and concurrences.

March 23, 2006, I'm afraid, is going down in history as one of the worst days in rural Ontario, certainly for farmers in particular. You could almost compare it to the stock market crash in 1929, specifically with respect to Ontario's rural economy and farm economy. We all know that the big stock market crash did not cause the Great Depression, but it was a symptom of the underlying weakness of the economy at that time and the underlying weakness in government policy of the day.

I think the same is true for this year's budget, the budget of March 23. While it hurts—many farmers are facing bankruptcy—it's actually a symptom of a larger and more harmful tradition, if you will, of neglect from this particular Ontario government. Over the past few years, we've seen signs that something is wrong. We all are aware of the tractor protests, the rallies, the blockades. There was a blockade in Whitby just today. Interestingly enough, the Minister of Finance was in Whitby today during the Whitby–Ajax by-election.

I also would advocate that this government has had a number of opportunities to fix this problem. I've offered some of my advice consistently. This particular government will turn its back. It's turning its back on rural Ontario. It's turning its back on the gentleman who is out in his car this evening, the fellow who spends every night in his car. He's a farmer. He is there on behalf of many farmers and is really a symbol of what's wrong out there. In fact, I think I saw him this morning. I think I saw Mr. Webster this morning with the farmers in Whitby. He's been dragged into that Whitby by-election as well, with the finance minister. Of all days, the finance minister showed up in Whitby a couple of days before election day.

Unfortunately, and to its own detriment, the McGuinty government continues to turn its back on farmers. The Minister of Finance had to be coaxed out of his car this morning. He was coaxed out by John Tory, actually. He wasn't going to go anywhere because the farmers had blockaded his car and agreed with Mr. Tory that maybe he should speak with the concerned farmers assembled.

Last week, there was a rolling protest around the precinct, around Queen's Park. Indeed, those tractors were rolling for most of the week, and that does tell us something. That particular rolling protest culminated with a rally on the front lawn. That was on budget day, the most important day in the life of any provincial government, or any government that does look well to the books.

Farmers from all walks came down to Queen's Park to make sure that this time around they wouldn't be ignored by the McGuinty government's budget, a budget that was due to be presented at 4 o'clock that afternoon. Yet again, this government turned a blind eye to those assembled.

This government can't plead ignorance. I've reported to this House time and time again the status of these pleas for help, oftentimes exemplified through a farm protest. I raised the issue on Thursday in question period just before the budget was read. On March 1, I reported to this House on the Clinton and Goderich farm rallies. On February 23, I raised the farm income crisis with the Minister of Agriculture, who's in the Legislature here this evening. On February 15, I reported on the Guelph rally, which was attended by the Minister of Agriculture, to her credit. On February 13, I informed the House of the upcoming rallies. On December 13 of last year, I told this House about the crisis facing Ontario farmers. I

raised this issue November 2. I could go on. I take Hansard very seriously. I could go on.

I don't think this government is listening. I feel there is no excuse to be not listening. People represented opposite must have known the damage being, I would say, purposely done to rural communities, to farmers, to their families, to their suppliers, the feed and fertilizer distributors, the farm machinery retailers, fuel companies, chemical companies.

At the Whitby Curling Club this morning, Minister of Finance Dwight Duncan had a perfect opportunity to come clean, if you will, with the very farmers he insulted last Thursday. Again, we got the traditional blame game. He told the farmers to go to Ottawa. However, over 30 million federal dollars have already been dispensed from federal coffers to 11,000 cash-crop farmers in the province of Ontario. This particular government—and we have seen no cheques from the province yet—waited a month after announcing its package, the \$125-million package we heard about earlier this afternoon, a package that represents 52% less than those intended, the cash-crop, livestock, horticulture industry were meant to receive. In fact, last year the hort industry received nothing. Just to be clear, and I'm suggesting this government is speaking out of both sides of its mouth when it did announce the \$125 million. It was \$134 million for desperate farmers, removing \$134 million compared to last year. Farmers cannot afford these kinds of \$134-million reductions from this particular government on top of endless tax increases, costly fee increases, higher energy costs, obviously, and the list goes on.

I mentioned earlier that there is a gentleman camping out in his car outside the Legislature. His name is Stephen Webster. He's president of Ontario's dairy heifer exporters. He's a director of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. I and many present have spoken with him a number of times. I'm not sure what this government is scared of with respect to Mr. Webster. It's one farmer living in his car in front of this grand, monumental edifice that we are present in here this evening. This morning he joined his fellow farmers in Whitby–Ajax just to hear what Dwight Duncan had to say, and again what it came down to this morning was that we're all paying more and we are getting less. I guess that's the Liberal way. It does sound like a cliché when you refer to Liberals as tax-and-spend Liberals, but we can add to that. We have a bunch here offering big promises, big spending and little offer of opportunities for investment in farm and rural Ontario.

There are claims from those opposite that they're doing great things for farmers, but I will quote the president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Ron Bonnett. This was information he sent out right after last week's budget, and I'll just quote one word. This is Ron Bonnett's opinion of the McGuinty Liberal budget as far as it relates to the farm community; one word: "shocking." He was right, it is shocking. It's a shocking budget.

This is a government that's rolling in higher-than-expected corporate taxes, higher-than-expected health

taxes. It is unconscionable that they couldn't find a penny more with respect to support for farmers in their battle with their heavily subsidized competitors. For tobacco farmers, there's nothing; nothing in the budget. Again, tobacco farmers hit the bricks yesterday in protest to this government and held a very large and well-attended rally at the Delhi Tobacco Exchange and in protest commenced selling tobacco tax-free. You could pick up a bale of tobacco, \$2 a pound, for about \$80. That would roll you an awful lot of cigarettes when you take that home. Clearly, the McGuinty government's war on tobacco farmers—with any war on tobacco or any group, there is collateral damage. With respect to the tobacco towns down my way, it truly is devastating.

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I arranged for a number of tobacco farmers to sit in on the budget speech. I arranged to have a number of cash crop farmers present for the budget. After hearing the bad news, I actually wished that I hadn't found the tickets for them. I saw the anger. I saw the hurt on their faces, the sense of betrayal. To use the words of Ron Bonnett, president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, what they heard was shocking. The Minister of Finance can put me in an uncomfortable position explaining exactly how dire things will be once farmers feel the full effects of this particular budget. Sadly, the McGuinty government war on tobacco farmers, and now corn and soybean farmers, and their families is entering a more dangerous phase.

Put yourself in a farmer's position: What do they do next? They've been asked to go to Ottawa by the particular minister. There will be an assembly there next week; I think it's April 5. But the concern now is that budgets are delivered every spring—albeit this one was moved forward about two months to capitalize on the opportunity to purchase some votes with respect to the by-elections. But we've had the budget. Fewer farmers are going to be around next year to attend the budget, and really what is there for them in the coming year?

I could go on. We know that last year's budget, the 2005 budget, was also a missed opportunity for people in the province. Last year, the McGuinty government also broke promises and increased the provincial debt. In 2005, the McGuinty Liberals introduced what at that time was their fourth fiscal plan in two years, which did little to help hard-working people in the province of Ontario. Just like this year, the 2005 budget showed the Liberals had a massive windfall, again from high corporate taxes and high health taxes, but reneged on its promise to balance the budget in 2007.

Then there was the 2004 Liberal budget. That clearly broke faith with people not only in rural Ontario but right across the province of Ontario. If I have time, I can go further on the 2004 budget. Many of us will recall the lowlights of that 2004 budget: \$1.6 billion in personal income tax increases; a \$3.9-billion electricity hike; the delisting of key health services of optometry, physiotherapy and chiropractic; a 50% increase in driver's licence fees. It's a hard-and-fast fact that the best way to lose good character is not to keep one's word.

I represent a riding of small business people, farmers, steelworkers, refinery workers and power plant workers. I represent a riding where it's very important to be a man of your word. If a government delivers one bad budget, it's a problem; if a government delivers a second bad budget, I suppose that could be somewhat of a horrible coincidence; but when a government delivers a third consecutive damaging budget, that's a devastating pattern and that is a permanent trend, no matter what we're told about next year's budget. We're told it could be a good-news budget with an election coming. I'm concerned that what we have here under this Liberal reign is a permanent pattern. I find it a very disturbing pattern occurring in the province. It's destroying the rural communities in my riding. It is bankrupting family farms. I'm very concerned about the desperate measures I see here to cover up budget cuts and broken promises.

I know we have at least one other speaker, and I think I would like to wrap up my presentation not only on the budget but just the importance of, very simply, this government getting its act together after what we saw as a shocking presentation last Thursday.

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering-Ajax-Uxbridge): It's my very distinct pleasure to rise today on the debate on Bill 82, the Supply Act, 2006, and to reinforce and elaborate on some of the minister's comments as he opened the debate earlier this evening.

As the minister was saying at that point in time, this is an important piece of legislation, although it would seem rather routine in its fashion, but important that it gets debated, because it is this bill, this particular bill that, if passed, will give the government the necessary authority it needs to implement its programs, fulfill the commitments we have set out and put the government's vision into actual practice.

Without it, we would be unable to improve the public education system, we would have great difficulty in our work to build stronger and safer communities throughout the province of Ontario or to improve Ontario's bridges or its roads or its transitways. We would have trouble in continuing to grow the dynamic and prosperous economic activity we have and build on this economy; to strengthen the universal public health care system that we hold so dearly here in this Legislature; and to work towards a more democratic government here in Ontario.

When our government came into office in the fall of 2003, we did inherit. We inherited multiple deficits. We inherited that health care deficit that we spent the first year focused on; an education and skills deficit that continues to plague the province, to some extent; an infrastructure deficit where one only needs to drive our roads and over our bridges throughout this great province to understand what's happening or not happening with infrastructure; and a rather nasty fiscal deficit. But in the last two and a half years, since October 2003, we've set out addressing each of these deficits in a planned and very deliberate way. Support in this Legislature for Bill 82 would allow us to continue to build opportunity for everyone who calls this great province of Ontario their home.

Approval of Bill 82 gives this government permission to do a variety of things. It gives us the necessary permission to send money to the municipalities, to hospitals, to the school boards around the province—in many cases our key transfer partners. It gives us the opportunity to pay the social assistance benefits that those who are in such dire need in this province have to have available to them. And it allows us to appropriately pay the salaries of those very dedicated members of the Ontario public service, some of whom are spending their evening with us here tonight.

Without this spending authority, without this legal opportunity, statutory payments could continue, though, to be made. But those statutory payments are more limited. They include interest on the public debt and all payments from special purpose accounts. However, unlike the statutory payments, scheduled and unscheduled payments cannot be made without passage of the interim supply motion. These payments, as mentioned, include things like payments to municipalities and those social assistance recipients and those on ODSP; and children's aid societies and the suppliers' accounts that make the government wheels turn; and nursing homes and hospitals and our doctors. These organizations and individuals deliver the very critical services the people of Ontario count on each and every day. To make sure that they can continue to provide those services, we have to ensure that funding is approved and carries on. To make sure our government can implement our program of change, fulfill our commitments and put the vision which we speak to into practice, we have to ensure that funding is approved and carried on.

What are some of the key components of the program we've set out and the vision we have? The same as when we got elected. They're in education. Those smaller class sizes; over half of those children in JK to grade 3 are now in classes of 20 or less. Improved scores in literacy and math; those scores now are averaging some 64%, I believe, or 62% higher than they were when we took office just over two years ago.

In the field of health care, there is the issue of access: more doctors and ready availability, the reduction in wait times, the capital investment in hospitals. On the economic front, to establish and to succeed in our economic potential, we need to continue to be able to invest in the auto industry; and in research and innovation, as led by the Premier under that new ministry. We need the capacity to invest in the roads and bridges, such as the \$400-million one-time funding that we identified in the budget debate, so that money can flow immediately to our municipal partners so they can do the bridges and the roads that are so desperately needed and build it into their current budgetary framework. The Supply Act is an important step in ensuring that its funding will be available for us to do the job that we were all elected to do.

2000

When we introduced our first budget, in May 2004, we laid out for debate and consideration by this government, by this House, a four-year plan for the province.

We've taken what were identified quite clearly in those first few months as serious challenges and we've made them into opportunities. Let me just give you a few examples of what we've managed to achieve in a very short period of time.

We've funded some additional 31,000 cardiac, cancer and cataract surgeries. We've undertaken more hip and knee replacements. The number of MRI examinations has increased by 42% since 2003-04. Dozens of more CT machines have been purchased for the public health system.

The government has also managed to reduce the wait times for elective cardiac bypass surgery from 30 to 15 days and reduce the wait time for radiation treatment by more than a week. The number of days, and less than a week, may not seem much to us as we stand here today, but I'm sure each of those individuals and their families who have seen those wait times cut by half and/or reduced by a week or more, with all of the stress and strains that go with waiting for care, are happy to find that they're spending less time waiting. I'm sure they would like to find a situation where they could go almost immediately and get the services that they desperately need.

Family physicians are seeing more Ontarians. First-year medical spaces are increasing by 23%. More nurses are attending to the sick or infirm in our communities.

In education, we've launched the most significant investment in higher education in a generation. We'll be delivering some 75,000 new spaces, doubling student aid and investing an additional \$6.2 billion in improved quality, accessibility and accountability in our universities, colleges and training programs. We've made tremendous progress with our young students. We've made progress on the standards in reading, writing and math.

All of this has been achieved with a prudent and balanced approach that allows us to invest in our future prosperity while keeping the taxes competitive in this province. Our investment in people through education, post-secondary education, training, research and innovation are reflected in the strong job growth enjoyed by Ontarians. Over 200,000 net new jobs have been created since October 2003, almost nine out of 10 of these being full-time jobs. Ontario's unemployment rate fell to an average of 6.6% for 2005, the lowest in four years. The Ontario economy added over 81,000 net new jobs in 2005, most of which were high-paying, knowledge-intensive jobs in management, science, education, financial services, transport and health. This is good news about our economy and is certainly great news for Ontarians.

Our government is on track to eliminate the fiscal deficit no later than 2008-09. A balanced budget will be achieved a year earlier, in 2007-08, if the reserve is not required. That's a long way from the \$5.5-billion deficit we inherited, of which 75% has already been eliminated.

As the Honourable Minister of Finance mentioned during the budget debate, last year the Ontario economy

outperformed the average private sector and government projections, resulting in additional revenue. We made a strategic and prudent choice to invest over 60% of this additional money to begin paying down the Ontario infrastructure debt in order to support much-needed transit, roads and bridge projects across the province of Ontario. Why is that important? Quick, reliable and safe transportation is vital to our economic success. It's also essential to the quality of life that we all aspire to. Ontario can prosper only if people and goods can move efficiently and effectively. Families will enjoy a higher quality of life if they spend less time in traffic, breathe cleaner air and travel more safely on improved roads, bridges and by transit.

In our budget, we announced Move Ontario, a new \$1.2-billion investment in public transit, municipal roads and bridges that will build opportunity for every Ontarian. The centrepiece is Move Ontario, an \$838-million investment to enable the expansion of modernization of public transit in the greater Toronto area. This will include a \$670-million investment, money put in trust, enabling York region and Toronto to expand the subway beyond the borders of the 416 to the Vaughan Corporate Centre. This is the first time a subway in the Toronto area will cross out of the city of Toronto and into the regions beyond.

With \$95 million to the city of Brampton, we're enabling the city to make dedicated bus lanes available on several streets through Brampton's AcceleRide project, and some \$65 million to the city of Mississauga, enabling the city to develop a separate bus right-of-way for the Mississauga transitway. These are initiatives that have been in the planning for a long time that have been awaiting funding for projects that are much needed to move people in an efficient, effective way in fast-growing and what are becoming higher-density communities in the greater Toronto area.

We set aside \$1 million for an environmental assessment for transit improvements in Scarborough. It's intended for the opportunity to begin the EA process for future subway opportunities on the east side of the GTA. This spring, we'll introduce legislation for the Greater Toronto Transportation Authority, the GTTA, to plan, coordinate and set transit priorities and help to develop and implement a GTA fare card system.

We'll also provide municipalities, primarily outside Toronto, with an emphasis on rural and small northern municipalities, with some \$400 million in new one-time funding for bridges and roads, enough to repair some 800 bridges. These investments are in addition to our government's five-year \$30-billion ReNew Ontario infrastructure plan.

The supply bill is important. It's important for us to be able to continue the business of government. When we took office, in conclusion, we did inherit deficits, multiple deficits of a variety of sorts. Our first three budgets have made important investments in each of the three areas that we were concerned with at that point: the health care deficit, the education deficit and the infrastructure deficit. To ensure we have the funding available

for us to do the job we were elected to do, I urge all members of the Legislature to support the supply bill, Bill 82. To ensure government can deliver on the priorities of Ontarians, to ensure that organizations and individuals who deliver services critical to the people of Ontario, service Ontarians count on every day, can actually be paid, to make sure they continue delivering these services, we must ensure that funding is approved and carried on. The responsible thing for the Legislature to do will be to support the passage of the supply bill, Bill 82. It's my hope that all members of this House, at the end of the day, will support this bill.

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I only have about 10 minutes, I think, maybe a little less. I'll ask the member for Muskoka to throw something at me when I get close because I want to give him the opportunity to get a few words on the record.

2010

Very briefly, we've heard the Liberal members continue to talk about the deficit that they were left with in 2003. Clearly, there were challenges that the government of the day faced. We had two bouts of SARS to cope with and the blackout, which severely impacted our budgetary projections. There was no question, as a member of cabinet at the time, that we knew we were facing some very significant challenges in achieving that planned balanced budget. We would have, though. That's the difference between us and the Liberal government. We were committed to making the tough decisions to ensure that we were able to continue with the fifth balanced budget in a row.

We hear the Liberals talk about this. I go back to the Robert Nixon budget in 1990. He tabled a budget in the spring of 1990 with a \$50-million surplus. Of course, the NDP took power later that year and were facing a deficit close to—

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmings–James Bay): How much was that deficit?

Mr. Runciman: It was a very significant deficit.

They opted—in retrospect, I think they would agree—to try to spend themselves out of that situation. Our view, with the challenges—we would have controlled spending and balanced the budget. The Liberals took political advantage of it and, to give them credit, they have gained some mileage, but the reality is something different than what they continue to spout in this Legislature.

As I said, I only have a brief amount of time to talk, and there are so many areas that we could discuss. Manufacturing job losses in small-town eastern Ontario are a significant concern of mine, certainly. I have seen plant closures: Hathaway in my riding, the seat of the Hathaway shirt plant, which has a great history in this province and country, closing; Mahle manufacturing in Gananoque. We saw the Nestlé plant in Chesterville. We've seen Domtar in Cornwall, which I think effectively closed this week—1,200 jobs. We saw the World's Finest Chocolate factory in the Northumberland area—manufacturing job after manufacturing job. Especially, the impact is so devastating in small-town rural Ontario,

and there doesn't seem to be any recognition of that. There has not been any recognition, certainly in the budget, to address what is a growing concern. The projection is now that we may lose another 100,000 jobs. We lost 80,000 in the last year; we may lose another 100,000.

Agriculture: I was in my office during the break and got an e-mail from Caledon, from the township council there, talking about the crisis in agriculture and calling on us to act, as legislators. It was quite interesting to listen to the Minister of Agriculture in the House today when these concerns were raised with her, getting up and screaming across the floor, "so angry that you're calling this a crisis." Well, I happen to represent an agricultural riding. And I've travelled and spent an awful lot of time talking to the farming community, and not just the farmers themselves, but the feed dealers, the implement dealers, the folks who run the general stores. They are all feeling this in so many parts of rural small-town Ontario. But the minister's only response is to get up and scream at us for suggesting there is a crisis in rural Ontario. It's shameful, and apparently that's the only position she can take. But perhaps she will pay the price when the—

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: They are sexist remarks. Shame on you.

Mr. Bisson: How can they be sexist?

Mr. Runciman: Well, that's a Liberal for you. Just ignore it.

The reality is, when you hear the arrogance coming from across the floor it reminds me, going back, to when the NDP had a majority government. I used to get in the House and suggest, "You know, folks, some of you should start standing up for rural Ontario, not spouting the party line, because your jobs are in jeopardy." And they didn't accept that reality. The reality is, the best-case scenario for the Liberal government is that you're going to lose at least 20 seats in the next election. That's the best-case scenario for you. At least 20 of you will no longer be here. The worst-case scenario for you is you're going to lose 35 to 40 seats and you'll lose government. That's the worst-case scenario for you. Accept it.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Prophet Runciman.

Mr. Runciman: If you don't want to accept it, that's fine. I don't care. I don't care if you want to accept it. The reality is, you who represent small-town rural Ontario had better stand up and start speaking out for rural small-town Ontario and not spouting the government propaganda hour after hour, day after day in this place, and you may get re-elected. You may defy the odds and get re-elected. I've been around here for 25 years; I've seen it. Ask Mike Colle what reality is. If he's honest with you, he will tell you that at least 20 of you—if you look at the polls today, where we're virtually tied—are going to lose your seats. So start doing your job in representing the people who put you in this place in the first instance.

There have been a lot of comments about this being a Toronto-centric government and, boy, is it true. We had a question directed to the Premier today about the cut in

the tourism budget. What did he get up and talk about? He talked about Toronto. His whole response was about Toronto. I happen to represent the Thousand Islands. I represent a good chunk of the Rideau system. We have members here who represent the National Capital Commission, the NCC.

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa-Orléans): We got \$424 million for roads.

Mr. Runciman: Well, we didn't hear the Premier talking about Ottawa, we didn't hear him talking about eastern Ontario, we didn't hear him talking about northern Ontario, we didn't hear him talking about southwestern Ontario; he got up and talked about Toronto. That's the reality and the budget certainly reflected that reality. Toronto is the priority of this government, there's no question about it.

I want to talk about health care very briefly. Today the hospital in my community, the Brockville General Hospital, announced 30 job cuts. They're closing beds, they're laying off staff. They're closing the outpatient lab in Prescott, they're reducing services in the outpatient lab in Brockville. They're going to out-service housekeeping, administration, cafeteria. They're reducing diagnostic testing. This is going to have a significant impact in terms of health care in my region, and also a long-term economic impact. This, after the government promised not to increase taxes and brought in the largest tax increase in the history of the province, supposedly to improve health care. Again, this is small-town rural Ontario being impacted by this government that doesn't seem to give a damn about small-town rural Ontario. It's all focused on Toronto. T-O-R-O-N-T-O. Half the cabinet are Toronto members and that is their priority, that is their focus and this budget just strongly emphasizes that.

We had this tax deception—and that's what I call what happened with respect to this health care tax—where we see services cut, and now we see these small community hospitals and services being removed, wiped out, because of this Liberal government, this McQuinty Liberal government.

In terms of spending, we've heard a lot of stories about wild spending in the last few days of the fiscal year by a variety of ministries. I hope the clock is—

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker: Just a second. Point of order, Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I believe I heard the member use an unparliamentary term and I would ask that it be withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker: I'm going to ask the member for Leeds-Grenville to be conscious of the language that he's using so as to not inflame the response of some of the other members of the House. I'll return to the member for Leeds-Grenville.

Mr. Runciman: I'd hate to inflame the members opposite. It's the tyranny of the majority, I guess.

I do want to say we've heard a lot of stories about spending, rolling money out the doors in the last weeks of the fiscal year. I heard rumours the Attorney General's ministry just—you know, wild spending of \$20 million.

I want to ask public servants across the province who are concerned about the spending patterns of this government, the highest spending year over year of any government in the history of the province of Ontario, to call this fax number and let us know what's going on their ministries: 416-325-1493. Let us know. Let the hardworking taxpayers of this province know what kind of abuse is going on within this McGuinty Liberal government. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It's my pleasure to join in the debate this evening on supply and concurrence. Really, what we've been mainly talking about is the budget that was brought down last Thursday. I only have a few minutes to speak so I won't be able to bring up all the points I'd like to, but I have to say that my biggest disappointment with the budget was the fact that it was not balanced. We have to look at what led to the current budget. We've heard from the members—they keep repeating and repeating—about the \$5.5-billion inherited deficit. They go on at great length to try to spin this tale, but let's look at the revenue situation in the last few years.

2020

Just three short years ago, the total revenue for the province was \$68 billion. The prediction this year is \$85.7 billion. We've seen a \$17-billion increase in revenue. They made a budget a year ago, and after they made that budget, they had \$3 billion more in revenue than they counted on for this year. And yet still, even with that circumstance, they're planning on a deficit. I think that's absolutely irresponsible. With all of that revenue in relatively good times, they're still running a deficit.

It reminds me of the David Peterson years, when it was good times. The government should have balanced the budget but they just spent recklessly. I can see where the tax-and-spend brand for the Liberals comes from, because it's absolutely true. I remember my father, who'd been the past Treasurer, commenting. He'd just recently been the Treasurer when the Peterson Liberals were in, and he was saying privately that they should be balancing the budget. They weren't. They just spent more. They hired 5,000 more civil servants and they just spent all the money. That's exactly what they're doing right now.

This government, over their four years, is going to add \$10 billion to the debt of this province. The forecast for interest payments this year in the province of Ontario is \$9.4 billion, \$9.4 billion that could be used for support for farmers, for some tax incentives and other ways of helping the forestry sector; it could be used in health care; it could be used in infrastructure; it could be used in lots of different ways. But instead it's going to interest payments. It doesn't do any of us any good.

We're seeing an economic environment in Ontario where we have higher taxation and we're starting to see the effects of that. We have 80,000-and-counting fewer jobs in the province of Ontario. I would, because I only have 41 seconds left, like to point out that Quebec just had a budget this week as well. Even though I would say that their situation is tougher than ours, they balanced their budget. They balanced their budget at the same time as offering, over four years, a billion-dollar program for the forestry sector, recognizing what an important sector that is to the province of Quebec.

I would say that my biggest disappointment with this budget is that it is not balanced. I believe that the government is being irresponsible in their financial planning by not balancing the budget in the times that we see ourselves in now.

Mr. Bisson: I'm so glad I've got up to 50 minutes. I might even take it all if I'm provoked. I could take it all if I was provoked.

Ça me donne l'occasion dans cette motion, qui est devenue un projet de loi sous la Loi 82, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2006. Simplement dit, ce projet de loi alloue au gouvernement de payer leur « bill » pour s'assurer, à la fin de l'année, que tous les dollars dont ils ont besoin pour être capables de payer les dépenses de chaque ministère, que ce soit fait légalement, parce qu'ils ont besoin de passer ça à travers l'Assemblée. Ça nous donne une chance, comme vous le savez, de parler sur beaucoup de matière parce que ce projet de loi fait affaire avec le ministère des Transports, le ministère de l'Environnement et des autres. Ça me donne une bonne chance de parler d'une couple d'affaires.

Je veux commencer en parlant un peu de l'annonce qu'on a eue faisant affaire avec le budget de la semaine passée. On sait que le gouvernement provincial a annoncé dans son budget qu'on était pour faire certains investissements dans les transports en commun. Je veux dire premièrement comme néo-démocrate que je suis « supportif » d'un gouvernement qui veut s'engager à aider les municipalités de non seulement supporter les systèmes de transports en commun dans nos communautés mais aussi de les promouvoir.

C'est sur ce point-là que je voudrais dire une couple de choses. J'écoutais mon collègue M. Runciman qui, c'était très clair, était fâché. Pourquoi? Simplement dit, moi, étant un député de hors de Toronto, et Toronto étant un peu loin, il n'y a pas de métro à Timmins, à Hearst, à Smooth Rock Falls, à Moosonee ou à Peawanuck. Quand tu vas embarquer dans le métro dans ces communautés-là, tu vas te planter longtemps avant que le métro n'arrive. Quand ça vient même aux autobus, il y a seulement un système d'autobus municipal, de transport en commun, dans mon comté, et c'est dans la ville de Timmins, qui a environ 50 mille personnes. Donc, quand tu demeures dans une ville comme Hearst, Joggles, Mattice, Val-Côté, Val-Rita, Fauquier, Moosonee et d'autres communautés, tu te trouves dans une situation où tu dis, « OK. Je vais aller me planter sur le coin puis

j'attends l'autobus, » même si tu dois attendre deux hivers parce qu'il ne va pas y avoir d'autobus qui va passer dans ces villes-là, parce qu'il n'y a pas de transports en commun, et c'est le point que je voudrais faire.

Le gouvernement a fait deux affaires dans ce budget pour certaines municipalités, et positives jusqu'à un certain point. Ils ont dit qu'ils étaient préparés sur une période d'un an seulement à faire certains investissements dans le système de transports en commun à Toronto, à Mississauga, à Brampton et ailleurs. Le premier problème est que c'est du financement de seulement une année. Mais penses-tu pour une minute que le monde pense que le budget provincial, augmenté de 3 \$ milliards à cause des revenus—que tout à coup cet argent-là va disparaître complètement? Écoute, ça fait 16 ans que je suis ici, puis chaque fois que je vois un budget, ça fait la même affaire : ça monte. On ne fait pas descendre les dépenses du gouvernement d'année en année. Ça augmente. Moi, quand je suis arrivé ici, le budget provincial était environ 40 \$ milliards. On est rendu aujourd'hui à bien proche de 90 \$ milliards. En 16 ans, il a fait plus que doubler.

Le point que je veux faire est que le gouvernement va dire, « On est en faveur du transport en commun. On va faire de l'investissement, puis on va le faire une fois. » Mais c'est un peu comme sortir la première fois, puis la fille te dit, « Bonjour. Je vais te laisser tenir ma main, mais seulement un soir. » Tu deviens un peu découragé à la fin de la soirée, je vais te dire. Tu dis à toi-même, « Mon Dieu, je ne sais pas si je veux continuer dans cette relation, » un peu comme la relation avec ce gouvernement. Vous comprenez, madame la Greffière?

Le deuxième point est que c'est non seulement une année que cet argent est concentré dans une grande région urbaine. Pour les communautés comme le comté de M. Runciman, le mien, le vôtre et d'autres—pas le vôtre parce que vous demeurez ici dans le sud—il y en a beaucoup où il n'y a pas de transports en commun. On a vu dans ce budget deux mesures : numéro un, l'investissement capital, une année seulement, pour les grosses communautés comme Toronto et Brampton—bravo pour elles; mais deuxièmement, c'est la question des taxes sur l'essence. Ils ont dit, « On va garder notre engagement pour donner aux municipalités un cent pour chaque litre vendu pour aider au système de transports en commun dans leurs communautés.

Chez nous à Hearst on n'a pas de transport en commun, et pas à Moosonee non plus. Ça veut dire que, quand ça vient à ces deux mesures-là, ça ne fait absolument rien pour ces communautés. Je dis au gouvernement qu'on doit peut-être regarder ce que l'Ontario a fait de bien dans le passé et ce qu'on a fait de mal, regarder les autres « juridictions » et dire, à la fin de la journée, comment on peut faire les affaires pour que ce soit plus équitable et que, premièrement, ça marche bien pour les payeurs de taxes, deuxièmement, que ce soit un système qui est efficace, et troisièmement, qu'on

donne des services aux communautés qui en ont besoin. Regardez dans le passé.

Dans le passé, les transports en commun étaient une responsabilité partagée entre les municipalités et le gouvernement provincial. Je me rappelle que, si une communauté comme Timmins voulait acheter un autobus, il y avait un programme où la province aidait à défricher les coûts, à partager les coûts entre les municipalités et la province. Deuxièmement et plus important, il y avait un budget de transport, madame la Greffière, où le ministère des Transports donnait chaque année de l'argent aux municipalités qui avaient des transports en commun. C'était fini aux années environ 1996-1997. Ils ont dit dans tout le processus, qu'ils appelaient « who does what »—qui fait quoi. C'est beau en français. Oui, madame, « Qui fait quoi? » J'ai fait ça comme ça; voyons. Dans cet exercice de qui fait quoi on est arrivé—en anglais c'est même drôle sur l'oreille—on est rendu dans un système où c'est seulement la municipalité qui paie. Si le gouvernement aurait pu faire quelque chose de positif, c'est de dire aux municipalités à travers la province de l'Ontario que vous êtes encore préparés à vous engager à partager les coûts avec les municipalités.

2030

On a besoin de faire une de deux affaires dans cette province, quant à moi, envers nos municipalités. Quoi qui est clair, c'est que les municipalités se trouvent de plus en plus dans une situation où le fardeau ou la responsabilité fiscale pour beaucoup de services qui étaient déjà des services provinciaux est délaissé aux municipalités. Les villes ont besoin de payer les ambulances. Elles paient tous les transports en commun. Elles paient des services de santé. Elles paient toutes sortes de services sociaux dans les communautés qui appartiennent, franchement, à nous, à la province.

Soit la province avait besoin d'embarquer dans un processus où, à la fin, on partage les responsabilités—c'est une manière de le faire, comme on l'a fait avant—où on dit, « Si la communauté veut avoir un système de transports en commun, on va aider à payer une partie du prix et s'assurer qu'il y a certaines normes provinciales qui s'ensuivent dans ces municipalités—cela aurait pu aider beaucoup de communautés à travers la province : Ottawa, Sudbury, Sault-Sainte-Marie, Thunder Bay, London, Sarnia, Timmins et autres. Mais ce qu'on a vu, c'est une approche qui dit, « Seulement une fois. »

L'autre point que je veux faire, c'est qu'on aurait pu dire soit « On va partager les responsabilités fiscales » ou « On a vraiment besoin de regarder à ce que la province reprend comme responsabilités. » Par exemple, on voit présentement que la province a transféré aux municipalités beaucoup de responsabilités qui appartiennent, franchement, à la province, dans mon estimation.

Ce qu'on aurait pu dire, à la fin de la journée, c'est que nous, la province, sommes préparés à reprendre certaines responsabilités. Par exemple, sur la question du bien-être social, pourquoi est-ce que la province elle-même ne prend pas toute la responsabilité fiscale pour le

bien-être social? C'est un programme provincial, et là, on pourrait être dans une situation à dire aux municipalités, « Le 20 % que vous payez, on peut utiliser cet argent pour faire des ajustements dans d'autres parties de vos budgets. »

On aurait pu regarder la question de la santé publique. Pourquoi la province ne prend-elle pas toute la responsabilité sur la question de la santé publique? Ce sont des normes provinciales que la santé publique doit suivre. Ce sont des règlements provinciaux, des lois provinciales. Pourquoi nous, on ne la paie pas? On s'assure que les municipalités, avec l'argent qu'elles vont avoir en surplus en se retirant de la responsabilité fiscale, en la transférant à la province—cette approche donne aux municipalités une certaine habileté d'avoir les sous nécessaires pour gérer leurs besoins fiscaux et les services dans leur municipalité.

Ce sont les choix qu'on aurait pu faire, et le gouvernement a décidé de ne pas les faire. Ce qui est vraiment intéressant dans cette affaire, c'est qu'en 2003 le gouvernement provincial a dit, « Choisissez le changement. » Dans l'élection provinciale, vous avez un choix, ils ont dit; je m'en rappelle. Ils ont dit, « Aimez-vous la direction à la Mike Harris ou Ernie Eves, ou voulez-vous avoir un changement de voie? Voulez-vous aller à une place un peu différente? » Je pense que beaucoup d'Ontariens, correctement, ont choisi le changement. Moi, je suis d'accord. Je ne suis pas d'accord avec le choix qu'ils ont fait, mais c'est un changement quand même. Mais à la fin de la journée, est-ce que c'était un bon choix?

Ce que je dis, c'est que, après bien proche trois ans du gouvernement libéral de M. McGuinty, on se trouve avec pas mal la même direction que celle du gouvernement conservateur. On regarde les décisions que le gouvernement a prises envers ses responsabilités envers ses citoyens, et on voit parfois que c'est un peu la même chose; ça n'a pas vraiment changé. Puis on dit, à la fin de la journée, est-ce que c'était au bénéfice des électeurs de l'année 2003? Moi, je dirais que non, je ne pense pas.

I think a government has the opportunity in a budget to really put their stamp on things, to really say to people, "This is where we're going." For example, I remember being here when Mike Harris brought in his first budget. They certainly put their stamp on things, I gotta tell you. I don't like the stamp, but they put one, and we certainly knew where that government was going. But the interesting point is that the decisions they made, as controversial as they were, allowed them to give the voters a certain confidence to give them a second mandate. Now, I think people eventually recognized that the choices they made in 1996 never did pay off. If you look at municipal downloading and take a look at many of the decisions the provincial Conservative government made, at the end of the day it didn't stand the test of time. People looked and said, "Am I any better off?" And people said, "No, I'm worse off." They looked at, for example, the amalgamations of the cities of Sudbury and Timmins and Ottawa and others, and said to themselves,

"Well, am I better off?" And the answer was no. Government was further away from them. Things didn't cost less money. In fact, they probably spent more, and it became a lot more bureaucratic.

We look at the school boards. My area is probably no different than anybody else's. When the school boards were amalgamated, the promise was that we were going to save all kinds of money. I look at the school boards now and the size they are, and they've got to spend more money, not less. The bigger they are, the more bureaucratic they become. They made a bigger bureaucracy out of those school boards. They removed elected trustees, so the public no longer had a hand in really shaping the direction of the boards, and quite frankly they became much more expensive to run because of the size. The larger the organization, the more expensive it is, and the larger the geography, the more expensive it is, the point being, at the end of the day, most people looked at the changes the Conservatives made and they said to themselves, "Am I better off? Probably not."

A good example of that is municipal assessment. I remember that one of the first bills I sat on when Mike Harris came to government was the undoing of the NDP Municipal Act. We had made a number of changes to the Municipal Act to basically deal with a number of planning issues in the cities and towns across Ontario. One of the first things that the Tories did was to undo much of what the NDP had done and bring in what is now called actual value assessment. And, my oh my, we just had to listen to the auditor this morning to find the mess that's in. You've got situations, for example, in Kapuskasing, as it is probably anywhere else, where all of a sudden because of the sale of a house, by way of a record from the real estate sale, you end up upping the value on everybody else's house in the neighbourhood. It happens to be that if somebody overpaid—and that could be very much the case—everybody else is valued the same. They're doing computer evaluations that are basically driving the evaluations up, and as well, municipalities are cash-strapped and are themselves having to raise their own taxes. The combination of the two is driving people bonkers. So that didn't work.

My point is, in 2003 people said, "Let's choose change." And I would argue, are we any better off after three years? We still have the same municipal assessment system. We still have the same cities and towns that are amalgamated. We haven't tried to attack any of the downloading issues that have happened to the municipalities. In fact, it has gotten worse. I just say to the government, you came here on a mandate of change, and what I see is much of the same. So I say, you made some choices in this budget. You had choices in this budget to change direction, to send Ontarians a clear direction that you were going to do things differently, and instead you did not.

So at the end of the day, it's not for me to judge if that was right or wrong. At the end of the day, I think it's going to be the voters in the fall of 2007. I'm not going to presume to think that they're going to do one thing or

another, but I have a little bit of experience. I've been through a number of provincial elections, on the winning side, luckily for me, but on the losing side of my party on a couple of occasions, and I'll tell you, what I see happening now is indicative of when I've seen most governments get in trouble. The tell words are there in question period. The actions and how people react on the backbench is the same. It's almost as if you can tell. I remember the moments in the Conservative government. You knew they were in trouble when you started to recognize certain things from the time when you were in trouble. I see the same things now. And I say, well, I guess they're trying, as best they can, to put a good face on it, but at the end of the day, people are saying, "Hmm. We chose change and we didn't get it."

Now, let's get to a couple of issues that I want to put on the record in regard to some of the issues I think we needed to deal with. I dealt with most of the ones that I wanted to deal with around social assistance and the Ontario disability support program earlier today. I'd like to put on the record a little bit more the issue in the sense of the economic development side. What's clear to me is—and I'm not going to blame the Liberal government for all of this, because it's an issue that the Conservatives certainly had a hand in doing—there really hasn't been a government, I would argue, since Bob Rae that has actually tried to do something when it comes to economic development in places like northern Ontario.

I look back to 1990, 1991, when we came to government, and the condition of the forestry industry. It was basically similar to what it is now. It was a real mess. There were all kinds of problems within the industry. I remember at the time, nobody in industry and nobody in the unions and nobody in the communities really knew what had to be done. All they knew was that government had to do something to assist. I remember being at a number of meetings where angry citizens were yelling at us, because we were the government, asking for action. And the government said, "Okay, what are we going to do?" So we brought in some of the best minds, we had a lot of discussions at caucus, at cabinet, at cabinet committee, with various stakeholders, and we came at it not just from one perspective. I guess that's the one piece of advice I would try to give the government tonight.

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We came to the conclusion that there was no one thing we could do and hang our hat on and say, "This is going to fix the entire problem with the forest industry." In some cases, it was the issue of employee ownership. In Kapuskasing, which is now Tembec, Abitibi paper in Thunder Bay, and—what was the one in Sault Ste. Marie? The name of the paper mill escapes me now—in Sturgeon Falls and a whole bunch of places, the approach was, where employers were about to close the door and put thousands of workers out of work in those plants, we went to the workers and said, "If you're prepared to organize yourselves in an employee ownership bid, we will be there to assist. We're not going to lend you a bunch of money, we're not going to open up the coffers

and just give you cash, but if you can put together compromises in your collective agreement"—and that's what they were. If you talk to the workers in Kapuskasing or Sault Ste. Marie, they had to pay, by way of negotiated reductions in their benefits in their collective agreements, to finance some of the stuff they did. As a result, a whole bunch of those plants were saved. I just named a few: Kapuskasing, Sturgeon Falls, Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Atikokan and others—

Mr. Leal: St. Marys Paper.

Mr. Bisson: St. Marys Paper, that's what it was. I was trying to remember. The approach was to get workers involved in part of the decision-making of how we're able to restructure these plants.

The other thing we did was basically to change some of the conditions for the industry, for example, in mining, where we had lots of trouble at the time. Mining was probably worse than what forestry is today. We came to industry, and basically industry came to us. I remember a group called Save Our North, headed up by Steve Perry and others. That group lobbied—and it was the most effective group I've seen in a long time—in order to put pressure on the government to do something about mining. We came at it from a whole bunch of different perspectives. There were incentives as far as what we call the Ontario mines incentives program, in order to assist with the raising of dollars for exploration, because it's a very risky business. You need to have some type of incentives to assist investors, or people out there looking for investors, to attract the investors in.

We did dollars under OPAP, the Ontario prospectors assistance program, in order to support prospectors. We did the OLA system, which was to invest money in the technologies of bringing all of the paper databases together under one electronic database, where people were better able to look at what goes on in mining. We looked at regulation, which was one of the big issues of the day. We looked at the one-window approach to permitting. I hear the government trying to take some credit for that, but, quite frankly, we're the ones who did it. It used to be when you went to get a work permit in the mining industry, you had to go to about five or six different windows. You went to the Ministry of the Environment, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, and it might have been the Ministry of Health in some cases, under the health units etc. We said, "One window. Come in." I remember John Gammon, the then deputy minister, saying, "What we need is a Billy Bob working at the ministry. You go to that Billy Bob, and Billy Bob at the end of the day is the guy to take in all the applications and make sure everything gets done."

A good example of that is what happened at De Beers Victory diamond project in Attawapiskat: provincial permitting was done in record time. It wasn't done under the Liberals, by the way; it was actually done during the time of the Conservative government, but under our rules. I remember because I was part of the process, in opposition, as the representative of that riding, when De

Beers and others came to me and said, "We're having some difficulties. What do we need to do?" To the credit of the government, we put everybody in one room, and the permitting happened within a period of about a month. They took over two years to get federal permits. We held up the development of that project for two winters because the federal government couldn't get its act together.

My advice to the government on economic development is, you've really got to do a lot of things; it's not one miracle magic bullet that will fix the problem. In today's environment, there are a number of things you have to do. First and foremost is to deal with the energy issue. Electricity prices in this province—and you've heard my leader, Howard Hampton, speak to this on numerous occasions and you've heard others in the general public talk about it. I was meeting with management from Abitibi a little while back, and they just put it very bluntly to me. They said, "Why would anybody invest in paper in Ontario? If you had to do a major investment in a paper mill and you owned paper mills in different parts of Canada, would you invest in Ontario?" The answer was no, because of electricity prices. It's as much as three times higher than Quebec and Manitoba. So if you're going to make a major investment in an industry where 25% of its costs is electricity, you're going to go off to Manitoba and Quebec, where it's a heck of a lot cheaper. One of the things this government has got to do is get its head around that.

The other thing we have to do, I think, is really get serious about what we can do to assist with the structural costs that are really nagging the forest industry. We have to revisit a couple of issues in regard to the permitting stuff. That's the other issue. There are a lot of problems, again, with a company that wants to cut a particular area on their forest management plan and at times there are real issues when it comes to being able to get the kind of permits we need. Part of the problem is that there's no more staff at the MNR. The government, under the Tories, I think wrongfully so, slashed the MNR by about 60% of staffing and basically said to the companies, "You're now going to be responsible for your own forest management plan, you're going to be responsible for your own reforestation and it's all going to be done at your cost."

We're the only jurisdiction that has done that. We've transferred the entire cost of reforestation on to the companies. Now, should they be paying because they're benefiting? The answer is yes, to a degree, but I think we should have done the model that we did in the past and we should look at how to do it again, which is, you pay for it out of your stumpage. You charge a proper charge on stumpage to reflect the cost and then the crown is the one to actually do it, because part of the problem for industry is that it's a heck of a cost and it's a hell of a management issue for them to deal with when it comes to their forest management plans.

I'll put on the record today one of the problems that we have today. A company—and I think most of them

are fairly well intentioned—gets a forest management plan approval for five years. The only time we really find out if that plan has worked is at the end when we go in to do the audit. My argument is when you go in to do the forestry audit after five years, if you did something wrong in year one, it's pretty late after five years to try to remedy the situation. It's going to be much more expensive. That's why I think the crown has to be involved in the forest management planning process, so that everything is done correctly and we make sure that it's done in a way that is in keeping with the spirit of the sustainable forest redevelopment act.

The other thing that I think we could be doing, and we could be doing quite well—and I want to spend a bit of time on this—is the whole issue of value added. I've heard Minister Ramsay, with all respect, and others in this government talk about, "We've got to do value added, we've got to do value added." There's an initiative right now that he started, which I think is not a bad one, which is the cedar initiative. There are requests for proposals on cedar in northeastern and northwestern Ontario. I think in the end, that has some potential. I support generally what he's trying to do; in fact, I've been working with a number of proponents up in my part of the province and his part of the province, because we have ridings that are pretty close to each other, although very large. I've been working with some of the proponents.

However, there's a problem, and the advice I would give the government is the following: In cedar, it's going to be rather difficult to find one large operator because of the type of business it is. Cedar is the type of product, especially the cedar in northeastern Ontario, where it's not as if you can take the entire tree, like jack pine, cut it, make boards—two-by-fours, sixes, eights and 10s—out of it and the rest of it chip for the paper mills. Cedar isn't like that. Only part of it is good for boards; another part of it is good for shingles; another part of it is only good for mulch. It's hard to have one player basically do it all. It's really a difficult business.

I think the challenge is going to be trying to find the right connections between various proponents of projects so that one person takes the tree and takes the planks out of it, the other person takes the tree and does the shingles and the other person takes the tree and gets maybe combination shingles and mulch or whatever it might be. We really need to try to encourage those smaller operators, smaller entrepreneurs to get into it. I think at the end of the day, they're going to be better situated to keep the costs down in that industry in order to make it work. I don't think Tembec or the large players can do it, myself. Their overhead is much too expensive. I think it's not quite a family business, but it's a medium-size business where you really need a pretty lean operation doing it.

The other thing I would say is that the government, when we talk about value added, has to be a lot more serious about how we support the issues of value added. For example, in northeastern Ontario, like northwestern Ontario, we have an abundance of forests, an abundance

of fibre as far as various types of trees. There's balsam, there's birch, there's cedar—you name it. Why is it that we're not looking at doing something when it comes to hockey sticks, window sashes, wood for chairs and tables and all that kind of stuff?

Holland, which has a lot fewer trees than northern Ontario, the last time I checked, has more in value added in the forest industry than Ontario does. It's an interesting fact. In fact, Ontario is one of the areas that is much lagging—yes, Speaker? You're just at the edge of your seat. You're just right into this; okay. I thought you were trying to get my attention. It's really lagging behind pretty well all other nations and all other jurisdictions when it comes to value added. The thing that we can learn from those other jurisdictions is that there has been very direct intervention on the part of their governments in order to make it happen.

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For example, the first thing is that you have to find the entrepreneur. You have to find the person who's got the bucks. That's a hard thing to do in northeastern or northwestern Ontario, because people with a couple of million dollars in their pocket aren't around every street corner. Most of the big money is down in places like Toronto, Hamilton and others, where there's a congregation of large numbers of people where you're more likely to find that kind of money. One of the things we're very lacking in is that when you do have an entrepreneur who wants to start a project in northeastern Ontario, it is very hard to capitalize the project. It's hard to say, "I need \$10 million. In a population of 40,000 people, I'm going to go out and raise \$9 million. I've got my own million, and will go out and raise the rest." It's hard to find the people who are prepared to invest.

The second thing is, when you go to the banks, the banks won't touch you. There's an unwritten policy on the part of the major Canadian banks not to invest in northern Ontario, because they figure there's more risk in northern Ontario, less risk in southern Ontario, plus the pot is a lot bigger here. Trying to maintain a system of branches in a larger geographical area is, number one, more expensive, but number two, they don't want to take the risk. People who have been trying to invest for a long time have been telling me it's virtually impossible at times to get money out of the banks. So the government has got to step in, and we have to become the banker.

I am not one who believes that we should be giving someone who's trying to start a business a grant up front. I think you can grant certain things—if there's energy efficiency or training; that kind of stuff. Things like that make some sense, I think. But the actual dollars, bricks and mortar, really has to be a loan. One of the things we have to look at is how we reinvent the heritage fund or some other entity to really become the banker of northern Ontario, so that the entrepreneur who wants to start a project has half a shot of raising the dollars if he or she has a good idea.

Often I look at Smooth Rock Falls as a great example. There's a community that's undergone a lot of difficulty.

They're resilient as heck. The mayor and council are really working hard at trying to pull together a project around cedar. Hopefully this thing's going to fly. We're going to find out over the next little while. The point is, it is really hard for projects like that to capitalize themselves. So if you had a place where people were able to go to an agency of the crown, able to borrow the money necessary to capitalize themselves, it would become a lot easier to get the projects off the ground.

But let me tell you, that in itself ain't going to fix it. Let's say, for example, you have a \$10-million project in cedar, and you're able to borrow the \$8 million and you've got the \$2 million yourself to invest in the project. That's not going to guarantee you success. The other thing we've got to deal with is the issue of transportation. How expensive is it to transport goods to and from northern Ontario because of the long geographical distances? It's a really expensive prospect. What we need to do is look at possibilities of reducing that.

I think in northeastern Ontario we have a hell of an opportunity, with the Ontario Northland commission. If I were the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, I'd be fighting in cabinet for more money for the ONTC in order to do a couple of things: one, to invest in the rail system to speed up the trains a bit, because they are rather slow. You watch the trains that are hauling freight from Hearst down to Cochrane—you literally can run beside them, because the tracks are so bad. That adds to the cost of moving those goods down, so one of the very simple things we can do is invest some dollars to bring the rail bed to a better standard. That's why you hear people like Mr. Runciman and me and others get upset—God, you spent 80% of the dollars on transit in southern Ontario. What about places like Hearst and Kap and others?

The other thing you can do is invest in the ONTC in order to look at how we're able to reduce the cost for the shipper. If I've got, for example, a hockey stick manufacturing company in Mattice, and I'm able to produce my hockey sticks because I've got the labour force, the raw material, the building, and I've capitalized myself, I've got to get those sticks to market. It's a lot cheaper—

Mr. Delaney: I thought you said you were going to be 15 minutes.

Mr. Bisson: Well, I've got things to say.

It's a lot cheaper to grab the entire log and ship it to southern Ontario and process it into a product than it is to do it the other way around. One of the reasons is transportation, because you can bulk transport stuff a lot cheaper. So we need to look at the ONTC and others and say, "How are we able to reduce that price?" Imagine if you can, along that ONTC line, the ACR line going up the other way and the old CN tracks, being able to say that we will look at ways of being able to reduce the cost of transportation for operators in northern Ontario, in order to bridge the distance from places like Sault Ste. Marie or Timmins or wherever it might be to where the markets are in southern Ontario or the United States. That would be one way we're able to get at that.

The other is telecommunications. Long distance rates aren't what they used to be, I'll admit. But still, the idea of telecommunications is fairly expensive. People are investing in various technologies on the Internet, because now we've got fibre-optic systems pretty well everywhere, where we need to have them. That was a good investment by the provincial government, by the way, who spent a lot of money to make that happen. People are looking at, what—what is it called again, IDSP? You know, where they piggyback telephone on the Internet? I forget what it's called.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): Voice over Internet protocol.

Mr. Bisson: Voice over IP. That's right. People are looking at things like voice over IP, but I think we need to take a look at how are we able to provide communications in a cheaper way.

The other thing is the assistance with marketing. The same operator who makes the hockey sticks and the dice—how do you assist that operator to find markets? You've really got to do a lot of work to assist the entrepreneurs to develop markets not only in the United States, I would argue, but across the world. I think it's been an error in the longer run for us—because it's been so easy to sell into the United States, we've done it at the peril of opening up other markets. We really need to spend some money there, I believe, as a province. I don't believe in the feds doing this, by the way, I've got to say up front. I think the federal government is useless. I really believe that. I look at what they do, and they don't do it very well. That's why I get upset with the provincial government when they say, "We've got to wait for the feds to get involved." Man, if you've got to wait for the feds, nothing's going to happen. You just have look at most of the issues in our ridings and you'll agree. We need to take a look at how we're able do marketing much more effectively to assist our entrepreneurs to connect with where the markets are.

Product development: We have to spend more on R&D. I give the government some credit on this one. McGuinty has taken an interest that is probably more so than most, and actually there's some good R&D stuff happening. I think that's part of the issue that we've got to deal with.

My point is, there's a whole bunch of things that we've got to do—investing in education and other things—in order to assist at the end. I've just got to touch on education, because it is part of it. Meeting, for example, with mining contractors over the last couple of weeks, two or three weeks, they've all got the same problem. They can hire 60, 65 guys, but they can't find them. Why? Because when there was a downturn in the industry, most of the people my age got out and went into other things or left the community altogether. We saw our population in Timmins go from over 50,000, I think at one point, down to about 44,000. But who left? It was all the ones who were employed. So now what's happening is that they're trying to hire skilled trades-

people and they're trying to hire skilled miners, and they can't find them.

Here's the problem: It takes a fair amount of money for a skilled miner—anybody listening out there, you want a job? If you're a skilled miner, go to Timmins; you can make up to \$130,000 or \$140,000 a year. Oh yeah. It's \$130,000, \$140,000 a year. If you are a skilled miner, a hard rock miner, and you can still mine either—especially if you're a jacklight miner or something, you can make really good money. But the problem is that you can't find these people anymore; they're a dying breed. Industry is having to train them, and it's a really expensive thing. It takes two or three years to train a person to become a skilled miner. The technology nowadays is—the safety aspect and the technology and all that. So industry is sitting down with me, people like the Placer Domes of this world, the Kinrosses and Dumas Mining and others, and they are saying, "Listen, we don't mind doing the training, but here's the problem: We go out as a mining operator and train employee X. Once they get trained, they go over to employer Y. We've now trained for the other guy, our competitor, the guy who is stealing our"—they're not competing to sell gold, they're competing to keep their men. They're saying, "Why should we, as an employer, have to pay for all that?" I agree. I think it's a provincial responsibility, and one of the things we need to take a look at is really getting into a serious discussion with industry about how we support training needs so that there is a provincial training system in place to assist with the training of skilled tradespeople and miners.

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I'm an electrician by trade; I went through an electrical apprenticeship some years ago. Where I used to go to school, it was paid by the province. Nowadays, if you go to school as a skilled tradesperson—as a millwright or a mechanic, electrician, machinist, whatever it might be—you've got to pay tuition to get in. People will say, "That's fair. You've got to pay tuition when you go to college or university to take whatever." Hang on. It's a totally different kettle of fish here. You're taking people who are employed, who are training on the job, where basically there's a certain covenant in place between them and the employer, and they've having to pay for the tuition. So what do you think happens? In most of these places, the employees go back and negotiate for the employer to pay, so it's a cost to the employer. More times than not, it's not the employee but the employer who pays.

So I'm saying we really need to look at the whole issue of training in a much more effective way so there is proper policy in place when it comes to supporting training needs. On the economic development front, I think the government really has to do a better job of trying to deal with all of these issues, which brings me to my last point.

Applause.

Mr. Bisson: I thought you'd applaud. Thank you.

It brings me to my last point, and my last point is this: how to do that. I think this is the failure of this assembly. I've got to put it squarely at the feet of this government,

because you're the government there, but be it the Tories or the New Democrats, I'd say the same, quite frankly, and that is that this place, this Legislature, doesn't work. Tell me how we can really do meaningful work in this place at times, given the rules we have in this House and the rules we have on committee. Wouldn't it be better to have a real system of committee where, for example, if my colleague over here is interested in training, as I am, those people who are interested could find themselves on the committee and say, "Let's go out there and invite people in who can tell us how to develop a good training system"? I don't pretend to know what the hell the answer is. Do you? God, I've got some ideas, but I'm not the expert.

The thing about being an MPP is that you're sort of jack of all trades, master of none. Everybody comes to you, so you've got a little bit of information on everything. But what we could do is really empower committees, and that means they truly have to be—I would not say non-partisan. I think that's the wrong word, because we are partisan; we look at things differently depending on our politics. But they cannot be controlled by the majority. That's the problem.

I think most government backbenchers will agree with me, because they get caught up in the same thing. They've got a great issue they're really interested in, and all of the sudden the minister says, "Well, you can't go there because that's not where I want to go." All of the sudden the backbencher is like, "Oh, jeez. I can't go there." He's got to support his government because—I won't get into the story. We all know what it's all about. I was there; I know. I was in your situation. It was no different for me than it is for you.

All I'm saying is that we need to change the way we do business in this Legislature. At the very least, we've got to restructure our committees so our committees actually do meaningful work and also that when committees vote on an issue and refer something back to the House, there's some mechanism to make something happen after. It's really great to do a great committee report, to do all the work about what needs to be done and report it back to the House, and the minister goes, "Well, that was fun. That's nice. Thank you very much," and moves on. You want to make sure, at the end of the day, that something happens, which means you have to change how this place works.

I will argue that PR is one way of doing it. We need to go to a system where it's not an absolute majority that controls everything. Winston Churchill said it best: Of the systems, it's the best of the worst. How did he put it? I forget the quote exactly, but his argument was that as bad as the British parliamentary system is, it's the best of the worst or something like that—I forget the way he put it, exactly. He was right. We have not revamped our parliamentary system to look at how we really reflect our society. Look at this place: a bunch of middle-aged white guys, to be quite blunt.

Hon. Mary Anne V. Chambers (Minister of Children and Youth Services): Speak for yourself.

Mr. Bisson: But I'm saying, is this chamber reflective of our society? I don't see 50% women in this House. What's the percentage of women in this House? Does anybody know?

Interjection: It's 25%.

Mr. Bisson: If even that. If we look at people of colour, people of different backgrounds, we don't see the numbers here. I think that's a really sad statement in our society.

There's no perfect way of making sure we get everybody covered off, but certainly the system we have now isn't working. We could look at other systems that have gone the way of proportional representation, PR, where there has been a much more interesting representation in the House. Scotland, for example—in the latest machinations, where they've created a system of proportional representation that is not a pure program like Israel—has a system where there's just over 50% women. I think that brings a totally different dynamic to the House. My point is, if the government is elected on 40% of the vote and they have 60% or 65% of the seats, it's kind of a quirky majority. It seems to me that yes, the Liberal government in the last election had the right to form the government because they got more seats than everybody else so more vote percentage, but I don't think they had a clear majority. That would force them to listen to their backbenchers, would force them to listen to the opposition, and maybe then the opposition and backbenchers and everybody would work a little bit better together.

For example, I've had the pleasure of being a member of l'Assemblée parlementaire, and I've had a chance to travel around the world and meet politicians from different Parliaments. What has really struck me is that where they've got good PR systems, there's really some good parliamentary work done. I don't think we can ever go all the way to what they've done in Switzerland, but in Switzerland there's really an interesting system of PR that has worked. It's probably one of the most democratic systems I've seen. A good example is that the government of the day, a labour party, the Social Democrats, decided they wanted to impose their vision of daycare. They wanted to have publicly paid daycare—like most of us, Liberals and New Democrats—instituted in the country. But in their system, they couldn't do it without a referendum because it was over a certain ticket amount. So they went to a referendum and the public said no. The politicians had to go back two or three times until they got it right, until they finally developed a system that everybody bought into.

I don't think we can go to that extent here in Canada or Ontario; we don't have that kind of tradition. But certainly a system along the lines of Australia or Germany or New Zealand is one we probably can live with, the mixed proportional representation. I forget what they call it; I think MMP is what they call it, the mixed member proportional system. Under that system, you'd have ridings as we have now, so there would be ridings, 103 of them. An election would happen, and in each riding the one with the most votes would win and would become your MPP. But then you'd look at the party vote and say,

"The Liberals got 43% of the vote, so their numbers should equal 43," and you'd adjust everybody accordingly. If the Conservatives got 30% of the vote but only got 25% of the members in House, you'd increase their membership by five, and you'd do it off a list. I think the easiest way to do it is that you'd look at geography and see where it is that they don't have members and you'd pick the one who had the biggest percentage of votes. Let's say they were weak in northern Ontario; if their highest vote-getter in that particular part of the province was 20% versus somebody that had 18%, you'd take that person. At least the people voting would get to choose. So let's hope that at the end of the day we could come to a system like that, which would respond to many of the issues.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you. It's been a pleasure. I say to you that this is not just *au revoir* but good night. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Glad to hear that. Further debate?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Thank you very much. I'm happy that I have this opportunity, because I think it's important. Having heard the speaker from the third party and certainly the speakers from the official opposition, I am compelled to set the record straight, to correct some impressions that have been left out there that I don't believe are accurate.

I'm taking this opportunity to first of all talk about agriculture and our government's commitment to agriculture. I want to remind viewers this evening that our government, two weeks before the budget, because we knew there was an immediate need—there is an immediate need in the agriculture industry in this province—invested \$125 million: \$80 million for grains and oilseeds, \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers and a \$10 million investment in traceability, a need that was identified by the livestock and poultry sector, which will benefit from that investment.

I think it's important to remind the members of this Legislature and those viewing this evening that Ontario is the only province in Canada that has come up with the 40% that provinces typically share with federal programs. We know that the federal government—it was a commitment made, actually, by Paul Martin's government before they were defeated to provide \$755 million to grains and oilseeds. Mr. Harper, I believe politically, recognized why he had to follow through on that. Our government in Ontario is the only government that has provided the 40% share for grains and oilseeds. We are the only government in Canada that has provided additional support for fruit and vegetable growers.

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I heard comments about rural Ontario, and I heard the member from Leeds–Grenville barking over there—barking—at the members of this Legislature and talking about our commitment to rural Ontario. Let me remind the member from Leeds–Grenville, who has some very dire predictions, that it was the Progressive Conservative government of this province that downloaded onto municipalities. It had a very negative impact on rural

residents and rural taxpayers. It is our government that is setting that straight. It is our government that has unloaded health unit costs. We will fund health units to the tune of 75% by the end of this term. It is our government that has corrected the formula used by the previous government that prevented provincial government support for land ambulance to reach the 50% level that it should have been at. That's what our government is doing.

Our government has provided \$400 million for roads and bridges in rural Ontario, an area that the previous government totally forgot about. There was no money for rural infrastructure. Our government is committed to rural Ontario. We are investing in rural Ontario and we are investing in the agriculture industry in this province.

I'm happy that I've had the opportunity to correct some of the information presented this evening and—

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): The rhetoric.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Yes, actually, the rhetoric that we've been hearing, sadly, since the day the budget came out.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker: I would ask the members of the House not to do that. The Minister of Agriculture and Food has the floor.

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: Thank you very much, Speaker. I'm just grateful that I've had this opportunity to share these comments this evening.

The Acting Speaker: That concludes the time set aside by the House for the debate on concurrences and the supply bill.

Mr. Duncan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Duncan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Duncan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Mr. Duncan has moved concurrence in supply for the Ministry of Transportation. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay." In my opinion, the motion passes.

Mr. Duncan has moved second reading of Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay." In my opinion, the ayes have it. The bill is carried.

Pursuant to standing order 63, this bill is now ordered for third reading, which order shall now be called.

SUPPLY ACT, 2006

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2006

Mr. Colle moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 82, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006 /
Projet de loi 82, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2006.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. The motion is carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

It being close enough to 9:30, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 2115.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Michael A. Brown

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			Fonseca, Peter (L)
		Mississauga East / Mississauga-Est	
		Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Peterson, Tim (L)
		Mississauga West / Mississauga-Ouest	Delaney, Bob (L)
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Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti	Constituency Circonscription	Member/Party Député(e) / Parti
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Sault Ste. Marie	Oraziotti, David (L)	Nepean–Carleton	Vacant
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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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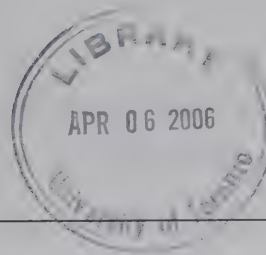
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No. 51

N° 51

ISSN 1180-2987

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Second Session, 38th Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

Journal des débats (Hansard)

Wednesday 29 March 2006

Mercredi 29 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 29 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 29 mars 2006

*The House met at 1330.
Prayers.*

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Mrs. Julia Munro (York North): On Monday, this House passed Bill 210, designed to offer greater protection and certainty to children under the care of children's aid societies. Our caucus voted for this bill. It did not contain every feature it could have, but it was a good bill, and we support every effort to better the lives of children.

Passing a bill is only the first step. The ministry has to implement the bill. Training staff or setting up programs like alternative dispute resolution costs money. Where is the McGuinty government going to find the money when it has cut the budget for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services by \$82 million? How can they pay to implement a new law when they have cut funding for existing programs? Which programs will the government cut: children's mental health, child protection, early years centres, children with disabilities? Ontario's children deserve an answer.

It's time for the Minister of Children and Youth Services to start speaking up on behalf of children. She needs to tell the Premier and the Minister of Finance to halt their \$82-million cut to children's services.

CONANT FAMILY

Ms. Judy Marsales (Hamilton West): It is my honour and pleasure to welcome the family of Ontario's 12th Premier to this Legislature today. Mr. Gordon Conant, who is named after his grandfather, is joined by his wife, Marsha; his son, Geoffrey; his father, Premier Conant's son, Douglas, who is turning 92 on April 8; his stepmother, Sydney; and his sister, Sandra Manning. Three generations are represented here today.

I have been friends of the Conant family for years, and until I was elected, I had no idea of their amazing connection to Ontario's history. I have since walked past the fine painting of Premier Conant and have also learned of his remarkable support for women, as reported in the *Daily Star* of 1942. Premier Conant said, "I think there should be women in every deliberative and legislative body," a truly remarkable statement and well ahead of its time.

Born outside of Oshawa, Ontario, in 1885, called to the bar in 1912, and an admirer of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, he became a lifelong Liberal. He was elected deputy reeve and the youngest mayor of Oshawa. Elected to the Ontario Legislature in 1937 by an overwhelming majority, Premier Mitch Hepburn made him Attorney General and, when he resigned, he appointed Gordon D. Conant his successor, the 12th Premier of Ontario. Unmoved by the furor and controversy surrounding his appointment, Premier Conant put the now-famous sign on his desk which read, "How to escape criticism: Do nothing, say nothing, be nothing."

Gordon D. Conant died in 1953, and was hailed by the press as a man of integrity who lived an admirable and useful life. Today his grandson, my friend and constituent who carries his name, visits this chamber for the first time, and Premier Conant's son remembers this building from his last visit almost 40 years ago. Please join me in welcoming the Conant family.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Welcome.

BROCKVILLE GENERAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): Yesterday, residents in my riding were greeted with news that the Brockville General Hospital is being forced to lay off staff, strip services, close beds and close its outpatient lab in the community of Prescott. This is an alarming example of taxpayers paying more and getting less under the McGuinty government and this government's disdain for smaller urban centres in rural Ontario.

After getting elected on a promise not to raise taxes, Mr. McGuinty brought in the largest tax increase in Ontario history under the guise of improved health care. What my constituents have received in return for that deception are the removal of services like physiotherapy and eye and chiropractic care, and now these job losses and further service cuts. This is not only the loss of important health care services for our region; it is also the loss of almost 30 good-paying jobs, and that has a long-term economic impact.

The bitter irony here is that the former PC government just three short years ago invested millions of dollars in the expansion and renovation of the Brockville General Hospital so that it could better serve the region. Yesterday's announcement is a significant blow to my riding and that corner of eastern Ontario and a disturbing indicator of the McGuinty government's "pay more, get less" approach to the province's health care system.

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Tony C. Wong (Markham): Last Friday in Markham, I had the privilege of meeting with a number of my constituents as well as community leaders and representatives from York region in order to provide them with a detailed account of our government's 2006 budget and to receive their feedback. I'm happy to report that the feedback was positive, particularly for the commuters of Markham and York region.

As regional chair, Bill Fisch said, "The Ontario 2006 budget provided significant news for Markham and York region residents and businesses, and we will continue to work with the provincial government on these important transportation and public transit initiatives."

Our \$1.2-billion investment in Move Ontario will strengthen transportation infrastructure, resulting in less gridlock and shorter commute times. Move Ontario will enhance public transit in Markham, provide a new subway to York region and invest \$7 million to support phase 2 of Viva rapid transit. For Markham residents, these major investments will mean more time with family and less time commuting, reduced business costs, a cleaner environment and a better quality of life.

I am proud that our budget addressed transit infrastructure needs in Markham, and I know that together with our municipal partners we will continue to provide a variety of public transit options for all York region communities.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke): Yesterday, the Premier, when asked in a press scrum whether or not he would extend the deadline for the appeals process of the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., responded with a deer-in-the-headlights look. But lo and behold, under pressure from the opposition and the third party, they announced yesterday that they would extend the deadline by 90 days. If the Liberals remain true to their character, this will be a 90-day extension of their deadline to do nothing.

While we're very pleased that property owners who have been living under a system that does not address the reality of property values in today's Ontario will be given this extension, much more must be done. The McGuinty government must do more than retreat to its burrow and hibernate for three months on this issue. It has been clearly shown that major reforms to the assessment system are needed. It is imperative that the government ensure that, within this 90-day period, a concrete, long-term solution to this problem be implemented. My colleague from Erie-Lincoln has already done the groundwork for them.

1340

It is no small irony that the government has ensured that the appeals extension will go beyond the life of this session, making it impossible for the opposition to question them in this chamber. Significant recommend-

ations have been made by the Ombudsman, and the government must act quickly. The shame of it is that they promised to overhaul this system almost two years ago and chose to do nothing. In fact, the Premier said it was working fine. He saw the draft of this report several weeks ago and knew what the recommendations would be.

Premier, you're the one with the big office; you're the one with the car and driver. Stop sitting on your hands—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Members' statements. The member for Hamilton East.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Ms. Andrea Horwath (Hamilton East): I rise to acknowledge all of the young women who are here in the gallery today from universities and communities across the province. They are part of the Miss G Project, an Ontario-wide movement that's pushing to have women's studies included in the secondary school curriculum. I want to commend all of the young women involved, particularly the four founders of the Miss G Project: Sarah Bhabrial, Lara Shkordoff, Sheetal Rawal and Dilani Mohan. A special welcome as well to Dr. Rebecca Coulter of the University of Western Ontario, who is the project's grand matriarch and a continuing source of guidance and inspiration.

Today the Miss G Project hosted a lunch for MPPs as a first step to getting this government to deliver results. It shouldn't be very difficult to bring women's studies into the high school curriculum. Really, it's a no-brainer, and we should just do it.

There hasn't been enough action on women's issues by the McGuinty government. Liberals seem to say all the right words, but when you look behind the words, there's little of substance: no action on stopping the claw-back; no action on the comprehensive program for domestic violence that was promised; no provincial dollars for a child care program for which they promised \$300 million; no funding as promised for children with autism and other special needs; no action on passing Bill 45, my bill, which would make workplace harassment a violation under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

I'm proud to be a New Democrat representing a party that fights every day for the issues that mean the most to women. I only wish the government would do the same. I would gladly trade the ministerial speeches for timely and concrete action.

Welcome, all young women. I'm very proud to be here with you today.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mrs. Carol Mitchell (Huron-Bruce): I'm very pleased to rise today to talk about some of the very positive things that were announced in last week's provincial budget for Huron-Bruce. All of the municipalities in Huron-Bruce will be receiving almost \$10 million in total. I can tell you, this is much-needed funding for our

roads and bridges. This will allow our municipalities to determine their own roads, their priorities. This is welcome news to the municipalities that are having a very difficult time repairing crumbling infrastructure. For 10 long years, there were very few provincial funds available for maintaining our roads and bridges, and combined with our severe winter climate, this played its damage.

Roads are the arteries of rural Ontario. They bind our communities together. Our commodities such as milk, eggs and manufactured goods from Volvo and Wescast need good roads to get in-time delivery, and it's vital to keep our area attractive to new business.

This government has not forgotten rural Ontario. I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to working together with municipalities, treating them as true partners and recognizing the contribution they make to our rural communities. This was recognized in our budget, the contribution that rural communities give to this great province of Ontario.

Mr. David Oraziotti (Sault Ste. Marie): I'm very pleased with the recent budget because it means more great news for Ontarians and certainly more great news for Sault Ste. Marie. We've listened to Ontarians and made responsible choices to deliver on their priorities, namely better health care, better education and better infrastructure, while ensuring transparent and accountable fiscal planning to reduce our deficit to \$1.4 billion, down 75% from when we took office.

What our budget means for Sault Ste. Marie is that we can move forward with the construction of our new hospital. It means \$4.7 million more for roads, \$1.2 million more in gas tax funding, greater funding for the Algoma Health Unit, more funding to train new physicians, and more spaces at Algoma University and Sault College.

What it means for my community is greater hope that the future will be brighter, that the youth will find opportunities in our community, that health care will improve and that access to a doctor will be easier, that support for our students from the earliest grades to the post-secondary level will be available, and that our local economy will continue to grow.

Ontarians will not forget the TV-game-show-style budget that was the Magna budget at an auto parts plant.

While the previous Conservative government left us a \$5.5-billion deficit and the NDP ran yearly deficits in the \$10-billion range, we're on track to eliminate the deficit within one to two years, but we will only make this claim when it's a fact and when it's confirmed publicly by the Provincial Auditor.

Most of all, this budget shows Ontarians that we're responsible with their financial resources and respect their priorities.

ROBERT COSTALL

Mr. Bill Mauro (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): I rise today to pay tribute to a courageous young man who died while attempting to bring peace and stability to a region and country so desperately in need of both.

Private Robert Costall, stationed with the first battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Edmonton, was killed while engaged in a fierce firefight with Taliban forces overnight.

Robert Costall was born in Thunder Bay, living in our city until he moved west with his father at the age of eight. At 19, he returned to Thunder Bay and lived with his grandmother before going to Quebec for military training.

A proud new father, Robert Costall was just beginning life's full and rewarding journey. Robert has been described by family members as being "strong in his belief for the Canadian military and what Canadians stood for."

There are no words I or anyone can offer that will help ease the excruciating pain or dull the aching loss of this exemplary young man, nor are there words that can truly or properly express the devastating death of a young person taken in life's prime. The tragic death of one filled with enormous potential and brimming with unlimited possibility is hard to comprehend and difficult to accept.

Too often we have a tendency to use words like "brave," "courageous" and "dedicated" with an almost indifferent frequency and without proper context, and thus they tend to lose some of the magnificence of their meaning. In recognizing Private Robert Costall, these words fit the example and aptly eulogize this gifted and complete young man.

He gave the ultimate sacrifice, his life, for the freedoms and improved quality of life for others—others he did not know and, sadly, would never meet. His efforts in bringing stability, peace and harmony to a country and its peoples, in defending his fellow soldiers and his devotion to duty will always be remembered.

To Private Costall's family, his wife, Chrissy, and their one-year-old son, Colin, we offer our deepest sympathies on the loss of a loving and devoted husband and father.

In recognizing Robert's efforts to help others gain a better quality of life today, let us remember his sacrifice and dedication always.

Speaker, I would ask that we all rise for a moment of silence in recognition of the life of Private Robert Costall.

The House observed a moment's silence.

VISITORS

Ms. Deborah Matthews (London North Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I would like to introduce in a non-partisan way the energetic, intelligent, dynamic women of the Miss G Project who are joining us in the Legislature today. I would like all men and women in this Legislature to welcome these fine women, leaders of the future.

1350

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: I want to welcome three bright young women to this Legislative Assembly, students from St. Kevin School in Welland: Sharon Michalak, Madison

Hamilton and Marley Kajan, and Marley's dad, Rodney Kajan, too.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 29, 2006, from the standing committee on government agencies. Pursuant to standing order 106(e)9, the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

MORE TIME TO APPEAL ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 PORTANT PROROGATION DU DÉLAI D'APPEL

Mr. Duncan moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation foncière.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The minister may wish to make a brief statement.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): This bill extends the deadline for appeal on MPAC decisions until June 30 of this year. It was provided to the opposition this morning at 10 o'clock. My understanding is that there is agreement with that.

I seek unanimous consent to put a motion to give second and third reading to this bill immediately so that we can implement it today.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance has asked for unanimous consent. I heard a no.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): I seek unanimous consent—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The member for Niagara Centre will come to order. Minister of Finance, order. This isn't necessary. The deputy government House leader.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker: Mr. Caplan seeks unanimous consent to move a motion regarding private members' public business. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Caplan: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Ms. Di Cocco and Mr. Lalonde exchange places in order of precedence such that Ms. Di Cocco assumes ballot item 59 and Mr. Lalonde assumes ballot item 34.

The Speaker: Mr. Caplan has moved that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Ms. Di Cocco and Mr. Lalonde exchange places in order of precedence such that Ms. Di Cocco assumes ballot item 59 and Mr. Lalonde assumes ballot item 34.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

FIRST NATIONS REVENUE SHARING PARTAGE DES RECETTES AVEC LES PREMIÈRES NATIONS

Hon. David Caplan (Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, Deputy Government House Leader): It is indeed a great pleasure that I rise today to inform all members of the House of an historic day for the government of Ontario and for Ontario's First Nations.

Earlier this morning, Premier McGuinty signed an agreement in principle that sets out a new partnership for sharing the economic benefits of gaming with Ontario's First Nations. It's great news. I want to underline the word "partnership." Our government is committed to taking a new approach to aboriginal affairs and to strengthening the partnership that we value greatly.

The agreement in principle commits the parties to negotiate a binding legal agreement by December 31 of this year, which will provide over 130 Ontario First Nations with more financial stability and a brighter future than they currently have. First Nations communities will be able to invest in important areas such as their people's education, their skills and their health care.

Let me briefly outline a few elements of the agreement.

Right now, Ontario's First Nations receive provincial gaming revenue from a single gaming source, and that's Casino Rama. That contract runs until the year 2011. Under the terms set out in today's agreement in principle, as of 2011, First Nations would be provided with 1.6% of gross revenue from all provincial gaming, and before 2011, Ontario First Nations would also receive approx-

imately \$155 million over the course of the next six years.

This was a huge piece of work. It took almost one full year for the provincial government and the Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership to arrive at this historic agreement. It happened thanks in large part to a highly dedicated group of individuals. I want to express my gratitude and the gratitude of this entire province to the negotiators for their very valuable leadership. Those people include former Ontario Premier David Peterson, who acted as the province's representative, as well as the following members of the Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership, or OFNLP, and I'd like to read their names: Gord Peters, Joe Miskokomon, Linda Commandant, Don Morrison, Mike Mitchell, Ernest Sutherland and George Kakeway.

I want to point out that a number of people from OFNLP are here in the Legislature with us today to witness history in the making. I want to introduce to you Steve Williams, the vice-president of OFNLP; Don Morrison, board member and treasurer; and Leroy Dolson, another OFNLP board member. Gentlemen, thank you for being here.

In closing, let me say that our government is committed to building opportunity for all Ontarians, and that includes Ontario's First Nations. We will continue this road together, working with our First Nations partners toward a goal that all of us share: healthy, prosperous communities.

I want to thank all members of this House for being here to witness this historic day.

L'hon. David Ramsay (ministre des Richesses naturelles, ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones): Je suis heureux de prendre la parole devant cette Assemblée aujourd'hui pour féliciter les représentants de l'Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership, l'ex-premier ministre de l'Ontario, M. David Peterson, et mon collègue M. David Caplan, ministre du Renouvellement de l'infrastructure publique, pour la conclusion aujourd'hui avec les Premières nations de l'Ontario d'un accord de principe relatif au partage des retombées économiques des jeux de hasard.

It is a pleasure for me to rise in the House today to congratulate representatives of the Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership, former Ontario Premier David Peterson, and my colleague David Caplan, the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal, who just made his statement, for the signing of today's agreement in principle to share the economic benefits of gaming with Ontario's First Nations.

This agreement in principle is another milestone in our government's relationship with the aboriginal peoples of Ontario, a relationship sustained by mutual respect and that will lead to improved opportunities and a better future for aboriginal children and youth.

1400

Since the launch of our government's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs in June 2005, the McGuinty government continues to build a constructive, co-operative relationship with First Nations.

Ensemble, nous pouvons améliorer le potentiel des peuples autochtones de l'Ontario.

Earlier this month, our government delivered a key commitment under the new approach through the launch of the Northern Table, a political-level forum dedicated to addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of northern First Nation communities. The Northern Table represents a partnership between our government and the Chiefs of Treaties 9 and 5 and will be dedicated to bringing greater economic opportunities to aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. It is a step that will help enhance First Nation participation in the benefits of resource development and boost the long-term sustainability of the northern economy. Over time, it will include other First Nations in the north.

Today's agreement once again reflects our government's commitment to help close the socio-economic gap between aboriginal peoples and other residents of Ontario.

Significant progress is being made and will continue to be made by the McGuinty government in improving relations with First Nations leaders and communities throughout the province. Our government is also making significant progress through land claim negotiations and the development of new programs and initiatives that are aimed at strengthening aboriginal communities.

Gaming revenues can play a significant role in strengthening the economies of First Nation communities and improving the quality of life for First Nations.

In closing, the final legal agreement that Ontario and the First Nations will develop, based on the terms of the agreement in principle, can help shape a better future for the First Nation communities in this province.

EMPLOI DES JEUNES

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

L'hon. Christopher Bentley (ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités): Aider les jeunes à acquérir les compétences et l'expérience dont ils auront besoin à l'avenir est une priorité de notre gouvernement.

With that in mind, I'm pleased to announce the launch of Ontario Summer Jobs 2006.

Our government is investing almost \$52 million in Ontario Summer Jobs to help over 56,000 young people find work this summer. I firmly believe that a summer job is a learning and growing experience. It provides young people with opportunities to test the job market and to try out a range of potential careers, many they may never have considered or known about.

Helping our young people acquire the skills and experience they will need for the future is a priority for our government. Through Ontario Summer Jobs, we are giving young people an opportunity to find rewarding and productive summer work.

L'année dernière, nous avons dépassé notre objectif en aidant presque 61,000 jeunes à trouver un emploi et à

recevoir un soutien grâce au programme Emplois d'été Ontario. Nous espérons faire de même cette année.

Ontario Summer Jobs provides a range of services, including a \$2-per-hour hiring incentive for businesses and community organizations to hire young people so they can gain valuable work experience.

I know it's challenging for young people to make decisions about careers and further education and training. It's also challenging for young people to get their first job. Students who are beginning their job searches can access services through community-based youth employment agencies and our colleges in more than 100 sites in 80 communities across the province. They can call the toll-free JobGrow hotline at 1-888-JOB-GROW to find the location of the organizations closest to them that can help them find a job or even start a career.

Creating a summer business is also an important part of Ontario Summer Jobs. This year, the government will continue to encourage and help young people start their own summer business through the Summer Company component of Ontario Summer Jobs. It provides hands-on business coaching and mentoring from local community business leaders. It's a great opportunity for enterprising young people who want to start and run their own summer business.

Starting a business or learning from others in the workplace are important experiences for young people. That is why Ontario Summer Jobs provides young people with a wide range of employment opportunities. For example, through the summer experience component of Ontario Summer Jobs, students can work as Ontario Rangers with the Ministry of Natural Resources. The rangers work in wilderness camps maintaining trails, parks and camp buildings, as well as helping in fish and wildlife projects. All of these experiences encourage young people to learn about the job market, explore potential careers and expand their job skills.

Notre gouvernement estime que les jeunes représentent l'avenir de la province. En appuyant l'emploi d'été, nous aidons la jeunesse à se prévaloir de possibilités qui pourraient contribuer à son succès futur.

By making priority investments like the one we are announcing today, we are helping to build the best educated, most highly skilled workforce in North America. This way, we will enjoy a strong and prosperous economy in which all people will find themselves sharing in our province's prosperity. If we can do that, we will build an Ontario with a quality of life that is second to none.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Response? The member for Parry Sound–Muskoka.

FIRST NATIONS REVENUE SHARING

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): It was my pleasure to attend the smudge ceremony this morning. I want to recognize the work of former Premier David Peterson in this agreement that has been reached. I note that Mr. Peterson did his work pro bono as a volunteer and I think he should be thanked for that.

I would also like to recognize the negotiating committee, including Harvey Yesno, president of the Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership, and the other members of the negotiating team: Gord Peters, Joe Miskokomon, Don Morrison, Mike Mitchell, Ernest Sutherland, George Kakeway, and especially from Wahta First Nation in Parry Sound–Muskoka, Linda Commandant, who I understand is not able to be here today.

I'd also like to recognize Chief Angus Toulouse, who was at the ceremony—he's the Ontario regional chief of the Chiefs of Ontario—for his work. At the announcement, Chief Toulouse said that he hopes the funding will in, in his words, "eradicate poverty" on First Nations and "break the cycle of dependency." These are certainly very worthwhile goals. Obviously more work has to be done, and this is an agreement in principle.

This government has been very good at making announcements; not necessarily so good at delivering results. It is my hope that this agreement will be implemented successfully and that the deadline of December 31 will be met.

EMPLOI DES JEUNES YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

M. Cameron Jackson (Burlington): Aider les jeunes et appuyer les compétences et les expériences dont ils auront besoin à l'avenir est une priorité de tous les membres du Parlement ici et de toute la province.

Minister, I would like to comment briefly about your statement in the House today. You say you're committing almost \$52 million. What you don't tell us is that this is a cut over last year's summer experience program for the province of Ontario. That is distressing news at a time when the students in our colleges have had to extend their school year by a further three or four weeks, not without thanks to you for taking over 10 days to even contact the parties to try and bring a resolution. In fact, the sum and substance of your contribution in the first 10 days of the strike was to announce a tuition increase for these very same students who are seeking employment this summer.

You state here that you know it is challenging for young people regarding their further education, and clearly that is the message the Ontario students' federation has given you, with your conduct during the recent strike.

You say in your press release that students who are beginning their job searches can start accessing these services. Minister, last year you made these announcements well in advance so students could prepare to seek summer employment, and I want to commend the former minister because she did it in a timely manner. You are one full month later. Take a look at the fact that the summer job services program you're announcing today has four business days left in which young people can apply in Ontario. Your summer company program for young people to start up their own summer businesses—you've left them with six business working days to put

together a company and to make application for your program. You've given the summer experience program, which is the program that you've cut the most—and I'm glad that you, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines and the minister for MNR are here today, because you've cut this program by almost 300 jobs for junior rangers, junior forester programs and other programs.

1410

You've left them with two business days. The cut-off for this program is March 31. The Ontario government regular summer student programming is open-ended, but this one is the kicker. We appreciated any effort to support the exchanges between Ontario and Quebec because the program you announced today was cut off on February 28, a month and a bit ago.

Minister, it's hard for the students in this province to take seriously your commitment as the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. You were late getting to the table to help them with the community college strike, you were disappointing in terms of having them at the table to assist you with a framework for tuition, and now, with two days left for your main summer student employment program, many are left wondering just what your intention was and why they can't apply with two days left.

FIRST NATIONS REVENUE SHARING

Mr. Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay): I will say first of all to the First Nations communities, to Chief Angus Toulouse and all of his team, congratulations for being tenacious in holding this government's and the former government's—under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves—feet to the fire to try to get what was the historical agreement in the first place.

Where are we at? There was a deal made between the NDP government and the First Nations back in the early 1990s that they would be into their own casino. They would be able to get revenues of almost, at today's dollars, \$1 million a day. Imagine what we could have done from 1995 up to now if First Nations had received that up to \$1 million a day that we get in profits from a casino like Casino Rama. We would have been able to deal with much of the infrastructure problem that we have in communities across northern, central and southern Ontario. We could have dealt with issues such as housing and water. We could have dealt with issues such as putting recreational facilities in those communities and giving First Nations families, their kids and the communities some of the things that we take for granted.

This government stands in the House today and says "historic." Hardly. I give you credit for having gotten to where you are, but it's nowhere near where they would have been if they had had the deal that was given to them in the first place. I say to the former Conservative government, shame on you for having put First Nations in this position in the first place; and I say to this government, it's hardly historic. We have a government that's asking, "How are we able to negotiate our way out

of this and minimize the exposure of our treasury towards the First Nations of this province?" I, along with others in this House who represent First Nations communities, know full well how First Nations communities are faring when it comes to their part of Ontario. When it comes to their share of Ontario, it is nowhere near what everybody else takes for granted.

We have communities such as Kashechewan. We all know what happened last fall, where the water was tainted and people couldn't drink the water. That is not just an isolated incident; that is what's happening across over 60 communities in the province of Ontario when it comes to First Nations. We have communities like Kashechewan, which doesn't even have a jail to lock somebody up in should there be a charge in that community, because their jail burned down. People were killed—two inmates—and an officer was injured, and this government has yet to find a lock-up facility for that community to make sure that, should somebody need to be arrested, there is somewhere to put him. Now what are you going to do? Are you going to arrest somebody and tie them to a tree? That's all you're going to allow that community to do.

I say to this government, you have to take your responsibilities and take them well. I give you some credit for what you've done today, but don't think you're off the hook, because all this is is a commitment towards a negotiated settlement that you say is going to be signed by next fall. Well, I've seen Dalton McGuinty's promises before, and they've been broken. We will be here as New Democrats—Howard Hampton and myself, who represent First Nations—to make sure that, at the very least, you keep this promise.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I would like to explain why Mr. Bentley's announcement is a positive one. The students who are here watching these debates would probably understand it better than I, Mr. Bentley, or dare I say, Monsieur McGuinty.

I suspect some of these students are paying incredibly high tuition fees. If some of those young men and women are going to the law school here at the U of T, they will be paying, this year alone, \$17,000. Courtesy of Monsieur Bentley, next year they're going to get whacked with an 8% increase, which amounts to, more or less, a \$1,500 hit.

The ministers on that side think this is okay. In fact, even the U of T thinks it's okay. If you're going to medical school, you're probably going to be paying 15,000 bucks here at the U of T. You're going to get whacked this September with an 8% increase. Mr. Bentley thinks this is okay. Maybe that is why he is providing a little help—less than last year, but any help is better than a kick in the teeth. Yes, summer jobs are going to be helpful indeed, and required to be able to pay these kinds of hefty tuition increases. Young men and women going to the U of T, just in a general program, are going to be paying \$200 more, added to the 5,000 bucks

they pay already, excluding books, transportation, and if you've got to live outside of your own city, you've got to pay for rent and housing, wherever you're going.

Monsieur Bentley, thank you so very much for the summer jobs. They're going to need them, because come this September they're going to get whacked in a very serious way. I just wanted to point that out.

ANSWERS TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On November 30, 2005, I made the following inquiry of the Ministry of Finance: "Would the Minister of Finance provide a date when he or his Deputy Minister Colin Andersen will be available to meet with Simcoe–Grey constituents from the Collingwood Condominium Ratepayers Association as requested in my letters dated August 19, 2005, and September 19, 2005, and would they also provide details as to why they have not responded to this request in a timely manner."

I believe the response to that inquiry of the ministry is overdue.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): It's my understanding that the answer to the member's question was due on Monday. Minister, could you indicate when you will be replying to the request of the member?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Later this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): A question today for the Premier: Roger Anderson, the chair of Durham region, had the following to say about your recent budget: "Durham is one of the fastest-growing regions within the GTA, and yet there was no mention at all for transportation."

Premier, Christine Elliott wants to know, the members of the assembly want to know and the taxpayers of Durham region certainly want to know, why was there no assistance for the region of Durham—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. We're not getting off to a good start.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): Tell her to pick up the phone.

The Speaker: Order, the Minister of Community and Social Services. The member for Ottawa Centre will come to order. The member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order. The member for Erie–Lincoln is patiently waiting to complete his question.

The member for Erie–Lincoln.

1420

Mr. Hudak: To the Minister of Community and Social Services, why doesn't she pick up the phone? Well, she'll be here soon enough to ask these questions right here in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, let me tell you.

Let me say one more time, Premier: Christine Elliott wants to know today, the members on this side of the House want to know today and Lord know the taxpayers in Durham region want to know, why did you ignore the region of Durham in last week's budget?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let me say what, in fact, we have done for Durham. The member opposite may feel that 22 million additional new dollars for roads and bridges is unworthy of comment, but we think it's very significant from a taxpayer and constituency perspective. In Clarington, they're getting \$1.4 million. The Durham region itself is getting \$10.8 million: Kawartha Lakes is \$5.8 million, Oshawa is almost \$3 million, Scugog township is \$857,000, and Uxbridge township some \$560,000.

Again, I could say that we are very interested in supporting not just this particular community, but communities throughout the province of Ontario.

Mr. Hudak: I suggest the Premier check his atlas. I don't think Kawartha Lakes has too much to do with the region of Durham, and certainly not the riding of Whitby–Ajax.

It's not just me, Premier. This is the chair of Durham region who has basically said that your budget had small potatoes for the region of Durham. It's almost as if when the Premier takes the Whites Road exit off the 401 in Pickering, he thinks he's gone into another province.

While you go on a hot spending spree in your budget, you basically gave Durham taxpayers the cold shoulder. The durhamregion.com news site states, "And all this time, we thought the province ignored Durham's needs. This is one of those times when it hurts to be right."

Premier, answer the question of durhamregion.com when it says it hurts to be right, that Durham was left out. Premier, what do you have against the taxpayers of Durham region?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: In addition to the \$22 million I referenced earlier for roads and bridges, the community of Whitby is receiving \$1.8 million as a result of our last budget, Ajax another \$1.5 million. Unlike the previous government, which closed a hospital, we are actually rebuilding and expanding the hospital in Ajax.

I'm also pleased to report that we have a wonderful pilot project for the JobsNow program that's under way in Durham as we speak.

We are working very well with the people in that particular community, and we will continue to work well with them long into the future.

Mr. Hudak: Premier, it's not only Roger Anderson, the chair of the region, who is criticizing you; it's not only the news website for Durham region. You know what? It's actually also your Liberal Party candidate who's trying to distance herself from you. If you look on her website, it's long on Judi but awfully short on Dalton

McGuinty. In fact, we couldn't find a single picture of Dalton McGuinty in any of her brochures. On her website you're not in the picture gallery. You don't even show up in her list of endorsements.

I've got to ask you, Premier, are you not supporting your candidate, and is she running from you because of your reputation as a tax-hiking promise-breaker or is she exiling you from her website because she's mad at you too because you totally left Durham out of the recent budget?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Judi Longfield, our candidate, doesn't need to hang her hat on any one particular individual or any particular organization. She's standing on her own two feet. She has a wonderful record of community service and we are proud to have her run under our banner.

I can tell you, one of the reasons she is being so well received at the doors, quite apart from her own record of personal service for her constituents in that riding, is because of our investments in the new courthouse there, because of the JobsNow program, because of the expansion of the 401 that's taking place there, because of the investment that we're making in the new hospital, the expansion of the hospital there. It's because of the new teachers we've hired in that community. It's because of the new doctors and new nurses that are working in that community. It's because of the ongoing commitment our government has to that community, which is far and wide different from the kind of record they were left with as a result of the previous government.

The Speaker: New question.

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): My question is also for the Premier. We do not agree with your government's decision to spend \$1.4 billion in order to avoid balancing the budget. However, since you have made this decision, why have you forgotten Ottawa? I believe the Ottawa Sun summed up Ottawa's place in the Thursday budget—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker: I'm going to warn the Minister of Community and Social Services. You need to come to order.

The member for Lanark-Carleton.

Mr. Sterling: They are pretty sensitive about what they do to Ottawa, Mr. Speaker.

The Sun said, "Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan rolled out the municipal gravy train yesterday. Unfortunately for Ottawa, the line seems to stop just a few miles out of the Big Smoke."

"Mind you, with recent polls showing the McGuinty government's" so weak in eastern Ontario, it's not surprising he has dealt eastern Ontario another blow.

Premier, you are from Ottawa, and yet you managed to largely ignore Ottawa in last week's budget. Can you explain why the city of Ottawa, the second-largest city in Ontario, will receive less than 2.4% of the funding you have allocated to transit and transportation, through

Move Ontario and one-time funding for the Toronto Transit Commission—2.4% of the total, that's what you gave Ottawa.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let me seize this opportunity to better inform the members opposite of some of the good news we continue to bring to the good people of Ottawa. In our recent announcement, we are sending \$33 million for roads and bridges alone to the people of Ottawa. The community has received \$30 million in gas tax and \$10 million for special municipal assistance. We're investing \$200 million in a light rail program, \$11 million for arts coming out of the recent budget, and \$140 million for a regional cancer centre. We are doubling the size of the Montfort Hospital, a hospital that organization tried to shut down. We've invested in two more MRIs, we're expanding the cancer centre, and we're investing in a newborn screening program at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. It's all good news in Ottawa.

Mr. Sterling: It's not only I who thinks Ottawa got the raw end of the stick. Ottawa Mayor Bob Chiarelli, a former Liberal MPP from this particular Legislature, said, "(Toronto) got the lion's share. Again." What an incredible understatement.

At a time when your party is fighting a by-election in Ottawa in the riding of Nepean-Carleton, you still seem to have forgotten that Ottawa exists. While Toronto, Vaughan, Brampton and Mississauga will receive \$838 million for transit funding for Move Ontario, Ottawa will receive less than \$33 million. It seems you do not want Ottawa to improve its transit and public roads. Premier, let me ask you this: How is it that a city like Brampton, which is half the size of Ottawa, receives three times the funding?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: This is more of the same. It's an old approach where you try to divide and conquer and pit one community against another. We just don't see the great province of Ontario that way.

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Let me just reassure the members opposite that we have not lost sight of my hometown of Ottawa. We are again investing \$33 million for roads and bridges, which we've just provided to the city of Ottawa; \$6 million for the Ontario municipal partnership fund; \$30 million in gas tax. Let me just dwell for a moment on that particular investment. Under that government, there was no support of any kind for public transit in Ontario. What we have done is put in place a new apportionment of our gas tax, which we are now turning over to our municipal partners. That is 30 million new gas tax dollars for the city Ottawa. That is stable, it is growing year after year and it's something that the people of Ottawa—

The Speaker: Thank you. Final supplementary.

Mr. Sterling: The Premier should really examine history, because he is unaware of what the previous government did for the city of Ottawa. I personally delivered a cheque for \$17 million to the mayor for new buses in 2001. In 2000, the former government gave over \$45 million for roads in the city of Ottawa. But under this \$1.4 billion of largesse, which you have given mostly to

the greater Toronto area, you have given us \$33 million—2.4% of the total.

Mr. Premier, you promised the city of Ottawa \$200 million for their rapid rail system. I ask you, why didn't you include the \$200 million in your Move Ontario trust fund so that you can't break that promise—

The Speaker: Thank you. The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Let's just take a look again at that government's record when it came to the community of Ottawa: First of all, they shut down the Grace Hospital; they shut down the Riverside Hospital; they tried to close the Montfort Hospital; they tried to remove the cardiac unit from the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario; they took over the Ottawa Board of Education; they fired the board of the Ottawa Hospital—of course, they would have nothing to do with the gas tax—and they downloaded all kinds of social services onto the city of Ottawa which are now being picked up by property taxpayers.

That is the legacy. That is the record. I will stack our record any day against that record in terms of our investment, our commitment, our support, our championing of the city of Ottawa.

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. The Minister of Natural Resources. The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Stop the clock. It's getting way too noisy in here. I'm going to be forced to start naming people if we don't bring this place into some kind of order. I don't want to do that; you don't want to leave. So let's get on with it in a business sort of fashion.

NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. On Monday, I asked about your government's failure to keep your promise to Ontario's most vulnerable citizens, our poorest children. You didn't have a good answer then, so I'm going to ask you the question again. Premier, why is the McGuinty government still clawing back the national child benefit supplement from Ontario's poorest children?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm sure that in his supplementary the leader of the NDP will want to correct the record and indicate to all present, and to ensure it's recorded on Hansard, that I was not in this House on Monday. I'm sure he's going to want to do that, Speaker.

Having said that, he has raised an important issue, and that is the national child benefit. What we have done with respect to providing additional support for our families is, first of all, increased social assistance by 5%. Beyond that, we have made permanent now, effective 2004, the additional benefits we are receiving from the federal government.

As a result of the investments that we have made and continue to make, what that means in practical terms is

that a single mother with two children is now receiving on an annual basis \$1,620 more than she would have received under the previous government. Is there more work to do? Of course there is.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, just two and a half years ago you said that clawing back the national child benefit supplement to Ontario's poorest children was wrong and you promised to end it. Today, under the McGuinty government, there are 443,000 children living in poverty. That's one in six kids in the province. That is a human tragedy and a black eye on a wealthy province.

Here's the situation. You had a \$3-billion budget revenue windfall. It would cost only \$220 million to eliminate the clawback. Tell the poorest children in Ontario why, when you have the money, you haven't eliminated the clawback of the national child benefit supplement which affects the poorest kids in this province.

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: It may not be significant to the leader of the NDP, but the additional revenues were \$2.4 billion, and they were not permanent in nature. They were one-time revenues, so we made one-time investments and we did that specifically in infrastructure, something that is durable and does not require ongoing support. That's why we did that.

Beyond that, we also did other things for children in this budget. We continue to invest heavily in education. We are reducing class sizes, specifically in the earlier years to ensure that more children receive more individual attention. We've invested, again, heavily in health care. We are also continuing with our program to provide immunizations free of charge to Ontario families. We are also the first Canadian province to cover costs for insulin pumps. We anticipate that program will cover 6,500 children affected by type 1 diabetes. So we continue to invest in more programs, more—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Mr. Hampton: Tomorrow working families will have the opportunity to send Dalton McGuinty a message about his broken promises to kids, about the shameful way he's punishing poor children by taking away money that was given by the federal government, intended to improve the quality of life for those children.

Premier, you say it's one-time money, but those who looked at your budget say that you're consistently underestimating your revenues and consistently overestimating your costs, just as Paul Martin used to do with his budget. You had no trouble finding the capacity to extend a capital tax break to banks in your budget, but suddenly when it comes to the poorest kids, they don't seem to matter any more. If you can afford to give and accelerate a tax break to the banks, which are raking in multi-billion dollar profits, then surely you can afford \$220 million for the poorest kids in the province. Are you going to keep your promise, Premier, or was that just another insincere group of words?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The minister would like to speak to this.

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I want to remind the member opposite what we have done with annualized dollars. Almost every single new annualized dollar available in this budget went to health care, education and vulnerable people, and let me tell you where. I want you to tell me which of these is inappropriate: intellectual disabilities and supporting those people who desperately need it, after you cut their services; or perhaps it's the intervener or interpreter services, after you cut their services. These are the kinds of decisions that we make in this ministry and that children's services makes in that ministry. Virtually every single new annualized dollar available in this budget went to two ministries: community and social services and children's services. That is what we place as priorities: those vulnerable people.

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PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora-Rainy River): To the Premier: The banks and insurance companies that are raking in billions of dollars in profits can afford to wait a couple years while you keep your promise to the poorest kids in the province.

But I want to ask the Premier this: Ontario's Ombudsman wants you to make two key changes to fix your arbitrary, capricious and secretive property tax assessment system. André Marin has directed you to make it mandatory for MPAC to tell the taxpayer how it came up with the assessed value of their property and for MPAC to justify its assessed value on appeal, to protect taxpayers from subjective and unfair property tax hikes. Will you commit to implementing those two recommendations of the Ombudsman immediately, Premier?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I want to take the opportunity to thank the Ombudsman for the work he's done in this particular regard. He has very helpfully placed before all of us some of the real challenges. In fact, he's confirmed those very real challenges associated with MPAC. I want to thank him for his work and thank him specifically for the recommendations that he's put forward.

Some of the good news here is the tremendous goodwill demonstrated by the leadership at MPAC, who say that they are looking forward to moving ahead on those recommendations. My Minister of Finance has specifically said that we welcome these particular recommendations, but we feel we have a responsibility to consult on them, and that's what we intend to do.

But again, there is a real issue here. I think we all recognize the inherent failings associated with the MPAC system that our government has inherited, and we look forward to moving ahead with those recommendations we received from Mr. Marin.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, the Ombudsman describes MPAC as an elitist operation with a "superiority complex" and "questionable practices" that result in thou-

sands of incorrect evaluations each year. The Ombudsman has directed you to make it mandatory for MPAC to tell the taxpayer how it, MPAC, came up with the assessed value of their property and for MPAC to justify its value on appeal, to protect taxpayers from subjective and unfair property tax hikes.

Premier, this is already in place in other provinces. Manitoba does this with their assessment system. Your government is in its third year. You own this system; it's your system, and you are running out of excuses. Are you going to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations or are we simply going to hear more excuses from the McGuinty government?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I think, in fairness to the process here, we just received this report. The member opposite is telling us that we should move quickly, and yet when the Minister of Finance just a few moments ago sought unanimous consent to move ahead with a bill that would bring immediate relief to property taxpayers who were seeking more time to appeal their assessments, they were not prepared to move quickly in that particular regard.

We think we've got a responsibility to speak to taxpayers and to municipalities about these specific recommendations. We think that's the responsible thing to do, and that's what we will do.

Mr. Hampton: Premier, we gave your House leader a letter indicating we were prepared to move forward tomorrow. But it's your Minister of Finance who wants to play trickery with this. We're prepared to move forward.

But again, I want to ask you about what the Ombudsman says. He says your property tax assessment system is David versus Goliath. It's "The average citizen, with scant information on his property and very little additional useful information to make his case, facing an adversary ... with a full bank of relevant data—collected at taxpayers' expense."

All the Ombudsman is asking is for you to make it mandatory for MPAC to tell the taxpayer how it came up with the assessed value of the property. It seems to me that's very reasonable. What's your problem in not acting on that recommendation? It's transparent; it's open; it means everyone knows the rules. What's your excuse for not acting now?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: The leader of the NDP is hot and cold on this stuff. On the one hand, he says he wants us to move quickly, but when it comes to providing immediate relief to those who are seeking to extend the time for their appeals, he's not prepared to move ahead with that.

Again, we welcome the recommendations. The particular recommendation just referenced by the leader of the NDP sounds to me to be sensible. But I think we've got a responsibility to speak to our municipal partners and to speak to taxpayers to make sure that we're moving on this both expeditiously and in a responsible fashion, and we look forward to doing so.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I have a question for the Premier. When the issue of skyrocketing property assessments came up this past fall, you're quoted on October 1, 2005, as saying you're not going to address the issue because "We didn't run on that." I remind the Premier that you didn't exactly run on pit bull bans or hiking taxes either.

You seem to have set the tone, because the Ombudsman's review found that there were three reports—one in 2003, one in 2004 and one in 2005—that showed major problems with the MPAC assessment process that apparently the McGuinty government sat on. Secondly, the previous finance minister, Greg Sorbara, appointed Mike Colle, now the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, to review the MPAC system. No report has yet been tabled. Premier, when will you publicly table Mike Colle's report?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): We were pleased to receive the Ombudsman's report yesterday. I was quite pleased that MPAC has already responded on 17 of the recommendations. There are two specific recommendations aimed at the government. I think, as the Premier said a moment ago in his response, it's prudent now to take those and discuss them with the municipalities that will be affected, with, by the way, the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Some of the information that will be released will be impacted by information and privacy legislation.

I think what's important to note is this—and we have acknowledged that there have been problems with this system since we took office. We have taken a number of steps in the past to address them. We have done a number of things already to respond to just the Ombudsman's report, which is only the most recent response.

So, we are moving forward. We're moving forward immediately on 20 of the 22 recommendations. Regarding the other two recommendations, the ones that require legislative change, I look forward to the opportunity—

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hudak: I find it rather passing strange that the minister ignored my very simple question about whatever happened to Mike Colle's secret report, the then parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. Your predecessor, Minister Sorbara, said that he would be taking on the next phase of reforms in property tax. Yet his report to the finance minister has disappeared.

You've had some time to address this issue. I have three proposals for you. First, for our debate on the bill you introduced today, please table Mike Colle's secret report on property assessments. Second, along with your 90-day extension, waive the \$75 fee for appeals.

The third thing: Just last night the North Bay council endorsed the Homestead Act, which would put real caps, at 5%, on property assessment increases. Will you include real caps on assessment increases as part of your bill?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This is awfully rich, coming from a party that brought in eight pieces of legislation and still

got it all wrong. We're determined not to make the same mistakes.

With respect to the member opposite, I enjoyed the Welland Tribune article on March 2. Its headline read, referring to the irony—"irony" because I think anything else is not parliamentary—"Hudak's Party Created Tax Problem." It was you who created the problem, and we are responding to that problem. Even in the St. Catharines Standard: "Hudak acknowledged ... the problem is an unexpected result of the legislation."

There is one thing we can do today, and we can do it immediately. We shared the legislation with the official opposition at 10 o'clock this morning. Pass the bill today to extend the appeal. Don't say no any more. The time for this kind of childish debate is over. It's time for real answers to a difficult—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

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ONTARIO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Mr. Howard Hampton (Kenora–Rainy River): My question is for the Premier. You have proposed changes to the Ontario Human Rights Commission that are opposed by most individuals and non-government organizations that have worked with the human rights commission. Will you scrap these unfair changes that you are proposing, go back to the drawing board and work with Ontarians with disabilities, new Canadians and visible minorities to draft a plan for reform that will work at the human rights commission?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Attorney General.

Hon. Michael Bryant (Attorney General): Yesterday, I met with members of the human rights commission, and we talked about these changes, these reforms, that are so long overdue.

I know the member will remember, because he was the Attorney General at the time, that Mary Cornish filed a report with the NDP government of Ontario, calling for direct access to the human rights tribunal, which we are seeking to move forward on, and a number of reforms which we're seeking to move forward on. These change are long overdue. They've been gathering dust throughout the time in which the NDP were in power and throughout the time the Conservative government was in power.

I think everybody understands that the delays that are inherent in the system do not serve human rights in Ontario. Ontarians deserve to have the best human rights system possible, and we intend to move forward with reforms to make that human rights system all the better.

Mr. Hampton: Well, Minister, the people who know the human rights commission the best are those Ontarians who have to go to it: Ontarians with disabilities, new Canadians, visible minorities. These are the people who say that your proposed changes are wrong and will make the situation worse. They say your cutbacks may mean

certain victims of discrimination will have to hire their own lawyers or suffer the loss of their rights and their dignity.

As a province, it is our duty to stand up for the vulnerable, not tell them to fend for themselves. These groups who are among the most vulnerable are asking you: Will you scrap your unfair and prejudicial plans, go back to the drawing board and work with Ontarians with disabilities, with representatives of new Canadian communities and visible minorities? Will you work with them to draft a plan that works, rather than your plan, which will make matters worse?

Hon. Mr. Bryant: On the contrary, we've been working with those very groups that the member just refused to get well over a year, and consulting with them. If we piled up the reports of recommendations as to how the reforms should take place and what the reforms should be, you would see a consensus, and you will see that they're long overdue. That's why the Toronto Star, in their editorial of last month, said that the long-overdue reforms are welcome. That's why the chair of the Ontario Bar Association said that the changes proposed are timely and well designed to solve current system problems. That's why Ruth Carey, the executive director of the HIV/AIDS legal clinic, said that the government should be widely applauded for the proposed reform initiative, as giving people the right to a hearing is a matter of simple justice and fairness.

I'm sure the member doesn't want to have a situation where he says go back to the drawing board, which means a step backwards. I'm sure what the member wants is that we, together, take a step forward to improve our human rights system. It's long overdue. You had a chance to do it, and you didn't; we are.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): My question is for the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. I was dismayed to read today in the press that the member for Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey has decided to not only appear publicly with the vocal minority in rural Ontario who spread a message of misinformation, fear and the implied threat of violent confrontation, but now, according to press reports, he is an active participant in confrontation.

The leader of the official opposition, desperate to avoid the consequences within his own caucus of losing formerly safe Tory seats in the by-elections tomorrow, has resorted to attempting to pander to farmers who are hurting. The leader of the official opposition is quoted today in the media as saying, "The Liberals, in effect, have cut back in the amount support they give farmers."

Minister, my farmers in Perth-Middlesex want to know the truth in this matter. They need your answer.

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo-Wellington): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order: Is it appropriate to pre-empt the time of question period to engage in a personal attack on—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Order. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I thank the honourable member for the question, because I know how hard he works on behalf of the farmers in his riding. I am very happy to have the opportunity to stand in this House and talk about the truth about what our government has committed to farmers in Ontario.

We have listened to the farmers of Ontario and we have provided them with \$125 million—\$80 million for grains and oilseeds, \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers—along with our commitment—and this has been consistent with what we have said to farmers for months. We agree with them; we need a multi-year partnership with the federal government. We are committed to working with the federal government to achieve that for the agricultural community in Ontario.

I encourage members opposite to pick up the phone and encourage their federal members to push the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance of Canada to act expeditiously. The needs in this community are urgent.

Mr. Wilkinson: I know that my farmers are increasingly frustrated with the multiple positions taken by the Leader of the Opposition just over the last few days. One day he dives in with us, calling for the Prime Minister—whom he actively campaigned for—to come to the table; the next day he backflips and says that he's not with us. On the one hand, he has called the \$125 million in short-term support we are delivering, as requested by real farm organizations, inadequate; on the other hand, he has clearly stated that he would not have used the additional revenue available to the government for this purpose, but would rather have balanced the books ahead of schedule.

My farmers are getting whiplash watching John Tory. Minister, what do you say to Ontario farmers?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: What I say to Ontario farmers is that we think it is very important that we have been able to provide \$125 million to them so they will have cash in their hands to do their planting this year.

I want to say as well that I'm very grateful to have received the letters that I have from farm representatives. I have a letter here from Ontario Pork:

"This letter is to thank you for the recent funding announcement by your government of \$125 million for ... agriculture. In particular, Ontario Pork is pleased that you have included farm-fed grains in the amount allocated..."

I also have one here from Ray Duc: "We're grateful for the announcement. It shows the minister has listened to our concerns and has acted on them."

The Ontario Potato Board has said, "On behalf of Ontario's potato producers, I would like to express our deepest appreciation for the financial support you announced last week on behalf of the government of Ontario."

There are producers and farmers in Ontario who—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

NORTHERN ONTARIO

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Minister of Finance. Your budget was not the only budget that was presented last week. The province of Quebec presented their budget, and there were some big differences. The biggest difference is that Quebec presented a responsible, balanced budget. Also, Quebec did not forget about the north. Quebec invested some \$1 billion in the forestry sector, on top of the \$450 million earmarked last fall and \$167 million in the previous year's budget.

Why have you ignored the north? What new dollars does this budget provide for forestry?

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): To the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Rick Bartolucci (Minister of Northern Development and Mines): In fact, it's to the contrary. This government understands the unique needs of the north and is addressing those needs in very, very real ways: for example, \$114 million in operating grants for the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, up \$3 million from last year; in capital infrastructure, \$357 million, an increase of \$60 million. Over the course of the next five years, the government will invest \$1.8 billion in northern highways. This includes \$357 million in 2006-07 for rehabilitation and expansion projects. This represents the largest annual investment ever. Unlike the previous government, which cut, slashed and burned northern Ontario, we're investing in northern Ontario.

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Mr. Miller: How can anybody believe anything you say? I'm looking at the budget papers; it shows the budget of the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines went down \$10 million, \$357 million to \$347 million.

Let's look at what people in the north are saying:

—"I'm fuming right now ... all they've done is thrown a bunch of hush money at us," said Papineau-Cameron Mayor Robert Corriveau," in the North Bay Nugget.

—"Doug West, a political science professor at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, said the Liberals clearly had next year's provincial election in mind when they drafted the budget, which he said offered virtually no help to northern Ontario."

—Sault Mayor John Rowswell: "... the single biggest disappointment for the north, failure to adequately address the crisis in Ontario's forestry sector."

—James Wallace, writing in the Sudbury Star: "Nor was there anything new or tangible for northern Ontario's troubled forestry sector."

What about mining? What about the number two industry in northern Ontario? Quebec allows tax credits that provide incentives for mineral exploration; in Quebec, a company can be reimbursed for up to 45% of exploration costs. Beyond the \$10 million for the mining centre of excellence, what new dollars does this budget provide for mining in northern Ontario?

Hon. Mr. Bartolucci: I only have a minute to answer the question, so let me say that the province announced \$10 million for the mining centre in Sudbury. This is a good-news budget for Timiskaming; this is a good-news budget for North Bay. Timmins applauds the provincial budget. There's all kinds of good news.

Let's talk about mining for a second: \$15 million over three years for geological mapping in the far north; \$60 million over six years for cleanup of abandoned mines; a mining tax rate reduction from 10% to 5% for new remote mines; a three-year Ontario mining tax holiday on the first \$10 million of profits generated by a new mine or a major expansion. There's all kinds of good news for the mining industry. There's all kinds of good news for infrastructure projects. There's all kinds of good news for the forestry industry. There's all kinds of good news for northern Ontario, thanks to a government that is committed—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. I know the member for Trinity–Spadina is waiting patiently. We'll try to provide a quiet, sensible forum for his question.

EDUCATION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): I believe that being the Minister of Education is a full-time job. If you agree with that, Mr. Minister, I think parents and students would like to hear you answer this question: Are you running for the leadership of the federal Liberal Party?

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): That question is out of order. It is not within the competence or responsibilities of the Ministry of Education to respond. Do you have a new question?

Mr. Marchese: Speaker, I have made the assertion that being the Minister of Education is a full-time job. What I have seen of the minister of late is that he's been busy meetings the Liberal organizers in Alberta; he's been busy meeting the Liberal organizers in BC; busy talking to the Toronto Star's editorial board about the sorry state of the federal Liberal Party. If you're so busy trying to become the federal Liberal leader, I'm saying step aside, talk to the Premier and say, "I want to step aside for the good of this government," so that he can appoint a full-time Minister of Education to do your job. That's what I think you should do. Will you do that?

Hon. Gerard Kennedy (Minister of Education): I'm very proud of being the Minister of Education in the McGuinty government. And let me tell you, when we were in opposition we asked questions about students, we asked questions about dropout rates, we ask questions about curriculum casualties, about people who were being left behind, about people in this province not served by that government or the one before that thought about a social contract ahead of the needs of students that let us lose our march on the world.

Under the McGuinty government, this cabinet, this caucus is making sure that every student in Ontario gets paid attention to. I'm very glad to be addressing the francophone teachers, very glad to be working with the people in Kingston, in Sudbury with Rick Bartolucci, advocating for the people of the north, and for the first time we're getting the same results for students in the north as we are for any part of the province, because we have a focus. I'm very proud to be one part of that focus, making sure that every student in this province gets an Ontario education advantage under a McGuinty government, and we intend to do that for some time to come.

Mr. Marchese: I appreciate what the minister is saying, that he has been focused very much on education. Of late, what I have seen his focus to be is the leadership of the federal Liberal Party. Why else would a Minister of Education meet with the editorial board of the Toronto Star if not to talk about his leadership? I didn't see any comment coming out of that editorial meeting with the Toronto Star saying, "We're worried about the fact that this minister is still dealing with a Conservative funding formula." I didn't see the Toronto Star editorial board coming out and saying that this government, this minister in particular, is still underfunding the educational system to the tune of millions and millions of dollars. Teachers are still being paid with 1997 dollars. The Toronto Star editorial board talked only about you and your desire to deal with the federal Liberal Party problems and your interest in running as leader. That's all I saw.

Hon. Mr. Kennedy: There was at one time some sympathy on this side of the House for why the critic never got to ask questions. I have to say, speaking for my colleagues here, that that sympathy has evaporated, because I spent an hour and a half talking to the Toronto Star about education, about the need for education partnerships. We invite the member opposite to not lose sight, as he has today, of the needs of students in this province. You ought, sir, to be focused on the needs of students. That's your job in this province, and you shouldn't be like the odd Toronto Star reporter who might want to ask a question on the way out of an editorial board meeting.

We talked about an education partnership being formed in this province. For the first time, teachers and parents, and students and school board trustees are all part of an education partnership that is deciding to provide a 15% increase in just two years in reading, writing and mathematics. All of that improvement is coming from the kids who have the toughest time reading, and it's coming because we have a government, we have a Premier—

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker: As the education critic for the official opposition, I want to publicly state that I endorse the Minister of Education for leader of the federal party.

The Speaker: New question, the member for London—Fanshawe.

Interjections.

The Speaker: I need to hear the member for London—Fanshawe. Order. The member for London—Fanshawe wants to ask a question.

1510

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London—Fanshawe): My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Over the last few days, several opposition members have said that our government has ignored those most vulnerable in our society; namely, those on social assistance. We all remember the Harris government and those mean, mad days when social assistance rates were slashed by over 21%. They froze minimum wages for eight years. We remember when Harris ministers told needy Ontarians to eat dented cans of tuna, as if scrounging around for dented cans was a dignified way to exist. We know that is the Conservative record. Minister, can you clear up for those who need to hear the truth and tell us what we have done to help those on social assistance?

Hon. Sandra Pupatello (Minister of Community and Social Services, minister responsible for women's issues): I think many of us in this House remember the Conservative years of government. What they did to the Ministry of Community and Social Services was cut the staffing by a full third over their decade here. They slashed agencies across the board by over 5%. But since we came in, yes, we're digging out of the huge hole that they left us in, a \$5.5-billion deficit, and we have to remember that that's where we've come from.

Yet in two and a half short years, in our very first budget, we made increases of 3% to those who are on social assistance, and again an additional 2%. Those who are getting special benefits received an additional increase in this recent budget. We are proud of the fact that we are moving forward and doing better for people who are on social assistance today. As the Premier reported in an answer to the question earlier, mothers with two children who are on social assistance today have benefited from \$1,620 more today than they did under the previous government.

Mr. Ramal: Minister, I'm happy to hear that we have done so much in such a little amount of time. So much has in fact been done, but we all know that more needs to be done. It's not easy to turn around the tragedy of the last government. I know that it will take more time to undo all the damage done by that former government.

Minister, we know that many people on social assistance, if given the chance, would gladly leave social assistance for the workforce. Can you give me some information on what initiatives we have taken to help those on ODSP and Ontario Works to get off social assistance and enter the workforce?

Hon. Ms. Pupatello: We in fact have a long row to hoe because our job in our ministry is to be certain that people who have an opportunity to work get every opportunity to take that job. People shouldn't have to be on social assistance when there's employment available. We need to help them get over the barriers to get that work.

What we've done was to make significant changes to break down those barriers for people who are on social assistance. The most significant is likely allowing people to keep that drug card. For moms with children who told us, "I'm one asthma attack away with one of my children from being out on the street," we knew that maintaining the drug card was important.

Recent announcements for ODSP recipients—being able to allow a \$100-a-month transportation benefit is a very important measure to allow them to go and find work and be able to keep work because transportation is so critical for people who are on disability.

We have made a host of changes in the system to make it easier for people to get back in the workforce. We intend to do more in that regard. It will be a far better place when we're through—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question?

Mr. Toby Barrett (Haldimand–Norfolk–Brant): To the Premier, your caucus has adopted the Farmers Feed Cities messaging. We saw them wearing the yellow T-shirts at the plowing match, and on at least two occasions members of your caucus have agreed to unanimous consent for MPPs in this House to wear the Farmers Feed Cities pins. Today, I've been asked by legislative security to remove two Farmers Feed Cities signs that are on the inside windows of my automobile.

Premier, do you agree with this directive? A second question, Premier: Did this request come from your caucus?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): Speaker, I'm in your hands in this matter, but I think this is something that falls entirely within your purview. It has to do with how security is governed on the precinct here, which has nothing to do with me or my government.

The Speaker: Supplementary, if there is one—I'm trying to understand the question. If the problem is with security in this place or on these grounds, the person you need to see is me. New question.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is for the minister for democratic renewal—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): If the initial question was out of order, the supplementary, by definition, is out of order.

The member for Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: My question is to the minister for democratic renewal. Madam Minister, a couple of days ago you announced that you were setting up a citizens' assembly. I think what we need to know, and all the members of this Legislature need to know, is that the all-party select committee recommended that, for any recommendation they make, it should be approved by 50% plus one of the people voting, that there should be no threshold on the turnout and that the bill should set out

in its body that it be of a binding nature upon this government.

To date, the questions that have been asked in this Legislature and the statements that you have made to the press have been, I would think, not very clear. They remain unanswered, whether or not your government is going in that direction. My question is a very simple one: Will you enshrine the recommendations of the all-party committee in writing to ensure that your government and subsequent governments are bound by the democratic will of the people of Ontario?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): I thank the honourable member for the question, for the suggestions and for his work on the select committee, as I thank the members of the select committee for their excellent work and for the document they produced. It was an honour to make the announcement two days ago that we will have a citizens' assembly to look at electoral systems, and if they so choose, to recommend possibly a change in our electoral system. The suggestions you brought forward will be considered very carefully, as will all the recommendations of the report by the select committee.

Mr. Prue: The reason I've asked this question is a very serious one, because on February 13, 2002, the Premier of Ontario, then in the opposition, wrote to the people of Victoria county, and I quote him: "I have committed that a Liberal government will ensure a binding referendum is held to allow local citizens to determine whether or not to dismantle the amalgamated city." On November 10, 2003, the people, some of whom are here today, voted yes on the ministerial approved question. The Premier, the cabinet, your colleagues, your caucus, have all said that they're not going to be bound by that democratic will of the people, in spite of what the Premier had to say. The citizens are here today. Two veterans are here today, two veterans who fought for democracy, two veterans who saw their colleagues go down.

I want to ask you, how can these citizens and all the citizens of Ontario believe you will respect the democratic will when you have a policy and a procedure already of not doing so?

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. John Gerretsen (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing): As we've always said to the people from Victoria county, or Kawartha Lakes or all the other people who are involved in these kinds of issues, it's the will of the council that this particular government listens to. If the proposal the council puts forward is fair to all the taxpayers, demonstrates fiscal self-sustainability, we will take a look at those proposals in order to look at the delivery model of the various services in a municipality.

Now, I noted that the people of Kawartha Lakes this week are extremely happy with the fact that in the budget last week they received, in one-time funding for roads

and bridges, \$5.8 million. The Ontario municipal partnership funding: The people in Kawartha Lakes received \$7.1 million this year, which is an increase of \$1.3 million over last year. That is in addition to the gas tax money they've received of \$1.3 million—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

1520

ENERGY CONSERVATION

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): My question is for the Minister of Energy. I've been following the work of this minister and the previous one with regard to conservation and creating a culture of conservation in our province. I was with the justice policy committee during the public hearings on this and we heard time and again that we have a culture of waste in our society, not a culture of conservation. Much is needed in the way of education. There are those who have lived through wars or they've lived through depressions, so they understand the intrinsic need for conservation and its importance in any kind of a program. But there are other problems that we face in terms of financial incentives. Again, we heard a number of times during the hearings concern for people who are living in social housing, the fact that they don't have the same control to maybe buy a refrigerator that's more energy efficient. I just want to get some details from you about what you are doing for that sector of our society to help them conserve.

Hon. Donna H. Cansfield (Minister of Energy): I'd like to thank the member for Stoney Creek for her continued involvement in the social service areas, not only in her community but in all of our communities.

We were very fortunate to announce a directive that went through to the power authority, to the conservation bureau, working with the social housing corporation and communities right across Ontario that says that 100 megawatts would come from those communities in terms of energy efficiency. So we will be using interest-free and paying down loans to enable the providers to go into about 250,000—ultimately 750,000—low-income homes to help them deal with replacing refrigerators, stoves and other appliances that aren't working, weather-caulking their windows, changing their doors, putting in insulation and enabling them to deal with those energy costs that they have to absorb.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. This completes the time allocated for oral questions.

PETITIONS

LANDFILL

Mr. Norman W. Sterling (Lanark-Carleton): "Whereas there is currently a proposal to more than double the size of the Carp landfill in west Ottawa; and

"Whereas this site has been in operation for some 30 years and had been expected to close in 2010; and

"Whereas the surrounding community has grown rapidly for the past 10 years and is continuing to grow; and

"Whereas other options to an expanded landfill have yet to be considered; and

"Whereas the municipal councillors representing this area, Eli El-Chantiry and Janet Stavinga, and the MPP, Norm Sterling, all oppose this expansion;

"We, the undersigned, support our local representatives and petition the Minister of the Environment not to approve the expansion of the Carp landfill and instead to find other waste management alternatives."

I have signed that.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches-East York): I have a petition, which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty, MPP, as leader of the official opposition, made the following commitment: 'I have committed that a Liberal government will ensure a binding referendum is held to allow local citizens to determine whether or not to dismantle the amalgamated city'; and

"Whereas, in the interest of true democracy, the Minister of Municipal Affairs put the following question to the voters of the city of Kawartha Lakes: 'Are you in favour of a return to the previous municipal model of government with an upper-tier and 16 lower-tier municipalities?'; and

"Whereas the voters, by a clear majority on a provincially mandated ballot, answered in the affirmative; and

"Whereas the council of the city of Kawartha Lakes has demanded that the province of Ontario honour the results of the 2003 election as it pertains to the minister's question;

"The undersigned demand that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act to honour the commitment made by Dalton McGuinty and to respect the will of the people as expressed in a democratic vote, and restore the former municipal structure as stated in the minister's question."

I'm in total agreement and would affix my signature thereto.

SPECIAL CARE HOMES

Mr. John Milloy (Kitchener Centre): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas hundreds of vulnerable adults live in homes for special care that provide them a warm and secure, stable and friendly environment which allows them to lead fulfilling lives; and

"Whereas the alternative for many of these individuals is a life of homelessness on the street; and

"Whereas special care homes have had only a single 3% increase since 1999, which in no way matches the rising costs they face; and

"Whereas the Liberal government promised Ontario in the election they would 'significantly increase supportive housing options for those suffering from mental illness';

"Therefore we, the undersigned, call on the government to bring in an immediate increase in funding to homes for special care."

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and it reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I support this petition.

SCHOOL BUS SAFETY

Mr. Ernie Parsons (Prince Edward–Hastings): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Where it has been shown that crossing control arms on school buses reduce or virtually eliminate instances of students being struck by their own bus; and

"Whereas 91% of all front-bumper fatalities involve buses not equipped with crossing control arms; and

"Whereas the safety of the children of Ontario is our number one priority;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to require that all future school buses be equipped with crossing control arms and that all existing school buses be required to be immediately retrofitted with crossing control arms."

I am pleased to add my signature to this petition.

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I support this petition. I sign it and I send it to the table through Sharmarke.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): Thank you for this opportunity. I met with three organizations of long-term-care facilities and they wrote a petition to the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care homes, need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

"Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

"Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils"—whom I met with—"and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I affix my name to this petition, support it wholeheartedly and hand it over to Ben.

1530

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

“Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver’s licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006.”

I am in full agreement with this petition and will affix my signature as well.

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition that is addressed to the Parliament of Ontario. It reads as follows:

“Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one’s good credit rating;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

“(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated ... form....

“(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information, the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer....

“(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supple-

ment or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.”

Since I agree, I am delighted today sign this petition.

CANCER TREATMENT

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario has an inconsistent policy for access to new cancer treatments while these drugs are under review for funding; and

“Whereas cancer patients taking oral chemotherapy may apply for a section 8 exception under the Ontario drug benefit plan, with no such exception policy in place for intravenous cancer drugs administered in hospital; and

“Whereas this is an inequitable, inconsistent and unfair policy, creating two classes of cancer patients with further inequities on the basis of personal wealth and the willingness of hospitals to risk budgetary deficits to provide new intravenous chemotherapy treatments; and

“Whereas cancer patients have the right to the most effective care recommended by their doctors;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Parliament of Ontario to provide immediate access to Velcade and other intravenous chemotherapy while these new cancer drugs are under review and provide a consistent policy for access to new cancer treatments that enables oncologists to apply for exceptions to meet the needs of patients.”

I agree with this petition; I’ll sign it. I want to thank Dennis Smith of RR2, Stayner, for sending it to me.

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Last Friday, I had the opportunity to meet with the family councils of Riverview Manor, Pleasant Meadow and Springdale County. They’re long-term-care facilities in the great riding of Peterborough. They gave me a petition. It said,

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas long-term-care funding levels are too low to enable homes to provide the care and services our aging seniors and parents, who are residents of long-term-care homes, need, with the respect and dignity that they deserve; and

“Whereas, even with recent funding increases and a dedicated staff who do more than their best, there is still not enough time available to provide the care residents need. For example, 10 minutes, and sometimes less, is simply not enough time to assist a resident to get up, dressed, to the bathroom and then to the dining room for breakfast; and

“Whereas those unacceptable care and service levels are now at risk of declining;

“We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents’ councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care

homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have here a petition signed by a great many citizens from the city of Kawartha Lakes, and it is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty, MPP, as leader of the official opposition, made the following commitment: 'I have committed that a Liberal government will ensure a binding referendum is held to allow local citizens to determine whether or not to dismantle the amalgamated city'; and

"Whereas, in the interest of true democracy, the Minister of Municipal Affairs put the following question to the voters of the city of Kawartha Lakes: 'Are you in favour of a return to the previous municipal model of government with an upper-tier and 16 lower-tier municipalities?'; and

"Whereas the voters, by a clear majority on a provincially mandated ballot, answered in the affirmative; and

"Whereas the council of the city of Kawartha Lakes has demanded that the province of Ontario honour the results of the 2003 election as it pertains to the minister's question;

"The undersigned demand that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act to honour the commitment made by Dalton McGuinty and to respect the will of the people as expressed in a democratic vote, and restore the former municipal structure as stated in the minister's question."

I affix my signature to this petition, as I believe that all politicians, and particularly the Premier, should honour their commitments.

COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): "Support Community Mediation

"Whereas many types of civil disputes may be resolved through community mediation delivered by trained mediators, who are volunteers who work with the parties in the dispute; and

"Whereas Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services established the Peel Community Mediation Service in 1999 with support from the government of Ontario through the Trillium Foundation, the Rotary Club of Mississauga West and the United Way of Peel, and has proven the viability and success of community mediation; and

"Whereas the city of Mississauga and the town of Caledon have endorsed the Peel Community Mediation Service, and law enforcement bodies refer many cases to the Peel Community Mediation Service as an alternative to a court dispute; and

"Whereas court facilities and court time are both scarce and expensive, the cost of community mediation is very small and the extra expense incurred for lack of community mediation in Peel region would be much greater than the small annual cost of funding community mediation;

"Be it therefore resolved that the government of Ontario, through the Ministry of the Attorney General, support and fund the ongoing service delivery of the Peel Community Mediation Service through Inter-Cultural Neighbourhood Social Services."

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): The time for petitions has expired.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI A TRAIT À LA GESTION DES SITUATIONS D'URGENCE

Mr. Kwinter moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 56, An Act to amend the Emergency Management Act, the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 / Projet de loi 56, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la gestion des situations d'urgence, la Loi de 2000 sur les normes d'emploi et la Loi de 1997 sur la sécurité professionnelle et l'assurance contre les accidents du travail.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Kwinter.

Hon. Monte Kwinter (Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services): I'll be sharing my time with my new parliamentary assistant for community safety, the member from Scarborough—Rouge River.

I rise this afternoon to speak about Bill 56, legislation that, if passed, will make Ontario even safer for residents. It is important to remember that Ontario is the only province in Canada that doesn't have emergency powers legislation, and that leaves us vulnerable.

In an ideal world, there wouldn't be a need for this legislation but, unfortunately, as everyone knows all too well, the world as we know it is now far from ideal. The tragic events of 9/11, as well as SARS and the power outage in 2003, clearly showed a review of provincial emergency powers legislation was needed. We needed this bill because we must be prepared for emergencies. SARS presented us with a new and unknown threat. One of the most important lessons learned from it was that the challenge is not in planning for the knowable, but in planning for the unknowable.

The people of Ontario deserve effective measures that will allow their government to best protect them during times of emergency, and they deserve to have them as

soon as possible. We need to have this type of legislation in place now, before something happens that would require us to build the boat in the middle of a storm on the ocean. The question isn't whether the province is ready for an emergency; it's whether or not it has the tools it needs to ensure that it can act quickly and effectively when an emergency occurs, because there is no doubt this province is vulnerable to another emergency.

1540

We introduced Bill 56 last December because we were encountering unacceptable delays in getting all-party approval in getting Bill 138, the forerunner to the current legislation, to second reading. Many of the details in Bill 56 have been carried over from the previous Bill 138, which was drafted by an all-party committee of this House and introduced on November 1, 2004, by the chair of that committee.

The Emergency Management Act, passed by this House in 2003, deals almost exclusively with emergency preparedness as opposed to emergency powers. It authorizes cabinet to assign planning responsibilities to ministers by order in council. The ministries identified as the lead ministries in the case of emergencies were required to develop emergency response plans to address their designated risk. It was a good first step, but it didn't go far enough to protect Ontarians in the case of emergencies.

By introducing Bill 56, the McGuinty government has taken a giant step forward in protecting Ontarians. Bill 56 would amend the Emergency Management Act to provide a comprehensive strategy for emergency powers, making Ontario's legislation more consistent with modern emergency powers legislation in other provinces and in other jurisdictions worldwide. The bill would be used only during defined provincial emergencies that would not relate to everyday occurrences in the province. So the powers used would apply specifically to the defined emergencies.

Provincial emergencies, by definition, are not, nor should they be, dealt with through statutes designed to address normal situations. The tools that Bill 56 would give us are the tools we may need in order to save lives when other measures are unavailable or inadequate. If passed, these emergency powers would allow the Premier and cabinet to make emergency orders that would promote the public good by protecting the health, safety and welfare of the people of Ontario in a manner that respects the rights of individuals.

We're talking about emergency orders such as those that would provide for evacuation, the establishment of emergency shelters or hospitals or the immediate purchasing of needed supplies such as bottled water. We have had only two provincial emergencies in the history of this province: SARS and the power outage, both in 2003. Bill 56 sets out a list of powers that can only be exercised in a declared provincial emergency.

The 14 order-making powers outlined in the bill include such things as evacuation, controlling travel, establishing facilities, requisitioning property, price-fixing and

authorizing service. The order-making power is conferred on cabinet, which in turn can delegate that power to a minister or to the Commissioner of Emergency Management for a maximum of two days. The bill also contains strict criteria that must be met for issuing an order and limitations on the making of each order. These orders could be enforced for a maximum of 14 days, but may be extended with the approval of cabinet. The bill contains significant penalties for failing to comply with an order or obstructing a person carrying out an order. The legislation would amend the Employment Standards Act to provide for job protection during a declared provincial emergency.

Although there have been just two provincial emergencies declared in the history of Ontario, there are numerous examples of smaller emergencies occurring in municipalities across the province. The Peterborough flood in the summer of 2003, the Barrie tornado 10 years ago and the tornadoes that tore through southwestern Ontario a year ago are all examples of natural disasters.

Every emergency situation needs to be managed. Bill 56 would give the government the authority and the tools it needs to effectively manage provincially declared emergencies. Those tools, the emergency orders in the bill, are ones that we hope we never have to use.

Even legislation designed to deal with events such as an environmental spill deals with situations that can be reasonably anticipated. Such legislation does not really address the catastrophic event that would call for a provincial emergency to be declared. It is the nature of an emergency that no one can plan for all eventualities or anticipate all possible scenarios or individual issues that may arise.

Another reason for considering general powers rather than changing existing legislation is that powers in existing legislation may not go far enough to cover the emergency situation at hand. The government currently has some of the powers included in the proposed legislation. For example, we have the ability to establish facilities, to construct works and to procure goods. The problem is that, in order to do many of these things under existing legislation, we need to follow sets of rules that in many cases are very onerous. Existing legislation is simply not designed for the quick response needed in an emergency. Having one act clarifies the existing powers. Clarifying the powers available to emergency officials in advance would help them carry out their functions quickly and with assurance in an emergency. Bill 56, if passed, would improve the province's ability to act quickly, decisively and in the best interests of the public.

Tony Clement, the former Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, pointed out in his testimony before the standing committee on Bill 138 that the next pandemic or public health crisis will have elements of similarity with the SARS outbreak, but also many differences. "The response structure must be flexible enough to meet any new situation," Mr. Clement said, "and that's why any emergency legislation must be broad to include powers of evacuation, cordoning off, price stabilization, resource control and so on." Bill 56 has those provisions.

We have said all along that, if passed, Bill 56 would make the government accountable for its decisions and would ensure transparency in its handling of emergencies. As I mentioned earlier, there are stringent requirements the government must follow. The bill would require the government to report to the public during an emergency. It also would require that the Premier table a report in this House within 120 days after determination of a provincial emergency. That report would have to specifically address any emergency orders made and provide justification for those orders.

This House has an important role under the bill. The bill provides that the assembly may disallow a cabinet declaration of emergency. Further, only the assembly can continue a declaration of emergency beyond the time limits set out in the bill. Bill 56 would make the government accountable for its actions prior to, during and after an emergency. Accountability and transparency are the necessary complements to the exercise of emergency powers. We are all accountable for our actions. Accountability is paramount in Bill 56 as well.

The powers listed in Bill 56 have been well considered, and have appropriate checks and balances in place. This is a balanced bill that offers similar protective measures to those in other jurisdictions. Bill 56, however, is not the McGuinty government's only initiative in the area of emergency preparedness. Under the Emergency Management Act, every Ontario municipality must have an emergency response plan and have filed it with Emergency Management Ontario by the end of last year. I'm proud to say that virtually every Ontarian lives in a community where such a plan exists, and a majority of communities have achieved what is referred to in the emergency planning business as the essential level and many are well on their way to achieving the enhanced level of preparedness.

But it didn't stop there. Last July, the Premier, after consultation with key government officials, mandated that all provincial ministries develop business continuity plans by December 31, 2005. I'm pleased to note that every ministry in the government met the deadline, and some ministries already exceed the minimum requirements. This year, ministries will be making all Ontario government employees aware of their plans and practising them to ensure they are complete, effective and understandable. In this way, should an emergency occur, whether it be natural, human caused or even an act of terrorism, the government will be well positioned to continue to provide citizens with continuity of services—something they have a right to expect and something they deserve. We need to learn from our past experiences and be even more prepared for the next time, because you can be sure there will be a next time.

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Bill 56 is a fair and equitable bill that will protect the citizens of Ontario while ensuring the government is held accountable for its actions. Since the legislation was introduced last December, we have met with many stakeholders, including the Ontario Medical Association,

the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Ontario Nurses' Association and the Coalition of Family Physicians. We have heard their views and are committed to continuing to meet with them to ensure that they are comfortable with the legislation. We know that we all share the same goal: to ensure the safety and well-being of the people of Ontario. The McGuinty government is always open to making legislation better. With that in mind, we will continue to talk to various medical and health care groups, and we look forward to hearing from other stakeholders as we move this bill through the Legislature.

Again, I'd like to underline the need for this legislation. None of us in this House wants decision-makers second-guessing themselves in the middle of a major emergency about whether they have the right power and authority or whether they don't. The residents of Ontario deserve to know that their elected officials are in control, that they know what they're doing and that everything possible is being done to keep them safe. Bill 56 enables us to fulfill that commitment and obligation.

I believe my parliamentary assistant for community safety, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, will now speak to this bill.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough—Rouge River): I would like to thank the minister for sharing his time and allowing me the opportunity to say a few words on Bill 56.

As the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services said earlier, Bill 56 is a valuable piece of legislation and deserves all-party support in this House. Bill 56 is all about making Ontario an even safer place to live and work. If we're going to protect the interests of the people of the province, Ontario must catch up to the rest of Canada when it comes to dealing with provincial emergencies. Bill 56, if passed, would give government officials the authority to make tough decisions quickly, in the best interests of the people as a whole, with the knowledge that legislation exists to support them.

The government's current emergency response powers and responsibilities are set out in the Emergency Management Act, but that act is designed primarily to ensure that appropriate municipal and provincial infrastructures are in place to deal with a local or provincial emergency. It ensures that communities and provincial ministries have emergency programs and plans in place and that they are tested and updated regularly. But that isn't enough to protect Ontarians in their greatest time of need. An important point to remember here is that this legislation would give the government certain powers to respond to a provincially declared emergency. It is our hope that should an emergency occur, everyone affected will do their very best to minimize the impact of the emergency and allow the proper authorities to deal with the emergency as best they can.

The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services outlined the benefits of this legislation and why it's needed. I would like to talk specifically about the contents of the bill.

In the past, we've seen examples of private concerns taking advantage of the public when demand exceeds supply. For example, in the power outage the province experienced in August 2003, no gas was available because the pumps weren't working. That left thousands of motorists in the lurch. When the power finally did come back on, prices went through the roof for a short period of time because of the high demand. That shouldn't happen, and Bill 56 will help to ensure that it won't happen again. Bill 56 would enable the government to fix prices to prevent increases owing to the emergency and would allow the government to prohibit exorbitant prices being charged, thus protecting Ontarians from price-gouging. Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan all have legislation to allow price-fixing, but Ontario will be the only province that would have legislation prohibiting price-gouging.

We know that the health care sector has expressed concerns about the provision in the legislation regarding authorization authorizing a person or a class of persons to render services. Let me be clear about what the proposed legislation would not do. It would not force any worker, health care or otherwise, to work if they choose not to. Bill 56 would not compel physicians to treat patients during an emergency, nor would it give the province the power to conscript workers—far from it. In fact, the last thing we want is to make it more difficult for health care workers to do their jobs in an emergency.

What the legislation would do, if passed, is allow for reasonable, qualified persons to provide services where willing. And that is the key: where willing. It does not compel service; it allows service. For example, it would enable Ontario to reach out to Manitoba, Quebec or other jurisdictions to send us qualified physicians to help the province deal with an emergency for the duration of the emergency only. It would also permit licensed drivers to operate vehicles such as full-sized buses even though they're licensed only to operate an ambulance or a small bus. That's not conscription; that's co-operation.

Other provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Saskatchewan, all have this type of legislation. This bill will permit the government, if necessary, to close public and private places where large numbers of people routinely gather; for example, closing all public beaches or parks, or shutting down businesses or schools situated close to an emergency site.

During the SARS emergency, the lack of specific legislative powers to deal with a number of issues that arose at that time required passage of SARS-specific legislation. Such targeted legislation, however, may not always be feasible in circumstances when the Legislature is not in session and it is not possible to quickly enact legislation. Or, if a mass evacuation of one community became necessary, the powers of Bill 56 could be used to establish an emergency shelter at, for example, a community college gym in another community.

Alberta, BC, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Quebec, Manitoba and Saskatchewan all have

this authority in legislation. Ontario does not. Orders under Bill 56, if passed, could be used to prevent people from entering or passing through a specified geographic area. Orders could prohibit vehicular and pedestrian traffic on a given highway within a specified distance from a particular facility. This would be particularly useful in the case of a nuclear emergency. In this regard, Ontario legislation lags behind the federal government, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland.

Ontario is the country's economic engine. It drives the national economy and is home to a significant segment of the Canadian population. We're also on the border of the United States and have to protect our interests in that area as well.

Bill 56 is critical to our future. While we can all hope that we won't experience another emergency, we should be prudent enough to be prepared to deal with it. It might not be tomorrow, next week, next month or even next year, but it may happen. Since no one can predict the next emergency or the magnitude or the impact of the next emergency, Ontario needs legislation that provides flexibility and powers to mobilize and take action to respond to any and all emergencies. We need to be ready.

The federal government and the other nine provinces and three territories have enacted strong emergency powers legislation. Ontario needs to be better prepared for the future. Bill 56 will help us take a giant step in that direction. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before questions and comments, I would draw the members' attention to the presence of Doug Reycraft, former member for Middlesex in the 33rd and 34th parliaments, in the east gallery.

Questions and comments?

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Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): I'm pleased to have a moment to respond to the speeches that were made this afternoon in support of this bill by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services and his parliamentary assistant.

The minister in his speech made reference to an emergency that took place last year, a tornado that went through the riding of Waterloo–Wellington and affected a number of our adjacent communities. I want to stand in my place and once again express public appreciation to the minister for his very prompt response to my invitation to come to our riding to tour the devastated area and, of course, there was an announcement a while after that of some provincial assistance to support our communities with their cleanup costs. It wasn't enough, but I continued to raise the issue in the following weeks and I'm sure the minister in some way was supportive of ensuring our communities were treated fairly. I would still argue that more money should have been forthcoming, but at least I do want to express my appreciation for the interest he showed and the support he gave to our communities.

In terms of Bill 56, what is missing is an important issue affecting rural Ontario, and that is support for double-hatter firefighters. The minister is not surprised

that I'm raising this, I'm sure, after four years, but the fact is that there continues to be need for support for double-hatter firefighters. As most of the members know, double-hatter firefighters typically are full-time professional firefighters who are employed by a city fire department but live in a small town nearby, and on their days off and their time off, in many cases they want to serve as volunteer firefighters protecting their neighbours in their home communities.

I would like to ask the minister a simple question. Why is it that every other province in Canada with the exception of Ontario and Newfoundland have legislative protection for double-hatter firefighters, and why is it that the Ontario Fire Marshal continues to request there be legislation brought forward to protect double-hatter firefighters so that they can continue to protect their home communities and the government continues to ignore their own fire marshal?

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): I'd like to respond to the comments that were made by the minister and the parliamentary assistant. The minister is right in terms of the history of this bill. It was in committee in a draft form and it came to this Legislature, but it came without the unanimous support of the committee because my colleague, Mr. Kormos, raised very serious concerns about the bill during the course of those proceedings. He wasn't the only one who raised some serious concerns with respect to Bill 138. In the SARS commission second report that was tabled in 2004, the Honourable Mr. Justice Archie Campbell said the following of Bill 138:

"The essence of the commission's concern is that the unusual process of proceeding to a draft bill of such profound legal importance, without prior policy and operational analysis by departments of government and without prior legal and constitutional scrutiny by the Attorney General, deprived the bill of the solid underpinnings that ordinarily precede the development of any important piece of legislation.... A sober second thought is now required."

I assume that part of the concerns raised by my colleague Mr. Kormos on that committee and part of what Justice Archie Campbell had to say led to Bill 56. The problem I see is that many of the concerns that were raised with respect to Bill 138 have not been addressed in Bill 56. My colleague Mr. Marchese later on this afternoon is going to highlight some of those.

This bill requires further work. There are concerns that continue to be raised by health care professionals. I'm aware of concerns, for example, of the Ontario Nurses' Association. I would say that this bill needs to go back to committee for public hearings so we can get it right.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): It's a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to have a couple of minutes to speak on Bill 56. This bill, of course, has direct relevance to the riding of Peterborough. On July 15, 2004, we experienced a rain storm that dropped in excess of 196 millimetres of rain in our community, creating a devastating flood. I was most appreciative that on the afternoon of the flood, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for Ontario, my colleague Monty

Kwinter, came to Peterborough to survey the damage, along with his colleague Dr. James Young, who was then head of Emergency Measures Ontario. They got the wheels in motion to start the flood recovery and provide assistance to the community of Peterborough. I must say, the minister at that particular time was awaiting his hip operation. He was in very serious pain and did climb aboard the OPP vehicle that afternoon and insisted that he visit all the various spots within the community to get a first-hand view of the devastation that hit my community on that particular day. We'll be forever grateful for the minister coming so quickly on that day. It was a very quick response, as opposed to when Peterborough had a previous flood in 2002, when the government of the day waited some six months to start the relief for the community of Peterborough. The minister, working with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, at the end of the day brought about some \$24 million of relief for the community of Peterborough.

Bill 56 is so very important to coordinate quickly, to make our response quick when communities across this great province are in times of need. I salute the minister's leadership in bringing this forward, because I think it's a bill that will respond to future emergency needs in Ontario.

Mr. Gerry Martiniuk (Cambridge): I'm pleased to comment on Bill 56 and the minister's comments and those of his assistant. Any emergency management has always been anathema in a democracy. They have been misused by tyrants throughout history. It's a bill that is absolutely necessary; however, it is imperative that this assembly and the committees that will take a look at this bill ensure that it is drawn up in such a way as to limit the powers given thereunder and for limited periods of time.

One of the safeguards already built into the bill is, of course, that an order made by the Premier would run for a matter of hours, 72 hours, whereas if it was the Lieutenant Governor in Council performing the order, it would last, I believe, for 14 days. Under section 7.0.11, the resolution declaring an emergency can be superseded by the assembly. I think we have to explore that difficulty if the assembly is not sitting, especially in a case where an order was made inappropriately and the assembly had to act. We have to ensure that there is a mechanism through which that could happen very quickly. I look forward to further debate in regard to the safeguards surrounding this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Response?

Hon. Mr. Kwinter: I want to thank the members for their comments, particularly my parliamentary assistant, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, the member for Waterloo—Wellington, the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Peterborough and the member for Cambridge.

I just want to respond to a couple of things that happened. The reason that this bill has taken the unusual sort of journey of being drafted as an all-party bill is because of the seriousness and the importance of this bill. We were really anxious to get everybody into the drafting of it so that we could, in fact, expedite this particular piece

of legislation. Emergency just by its definition is unpredictable. We don't know when it's going to happen, and we have a responsibility to the people of Ontario to make sure that we have this legislation in place so that we can act. We don't have the time to sit down and debate it when everything is falling around us. We've got to be able to say that we have legislation that allows us to protect the lives and property of the people of Ontario. Because of the urgency of this and because of the inability to get all-party consent, we had no other choice but to, in fact, bring forward another bill, which is Bill 56.

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But that wasn't really wasted—all the time before—because we had public hearings, we had comments by Judge Archie Campbell and we incorporated many of the suggestions that were made. One of his comments—and the member from Nickel Belt talked about it—was that he was critical of the process, feeling that it should have been brought through the House, had an opportunity for legislative counsel to take a look at the bill, which we've now done. There will be hearings, and we are now ongoing.

As I said in my opening remarks, we are still talking to stakeholders, people who will be impacted, to make sure we get it right. I want to thank all of you for participating and encourage you to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson (Simcoe–Grey): I want to begin by informing the table that we'll be standing down our leadoff speaker, if I could get unanimous consent.

The Deputy Speaker: Do I have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Interjection.

Mr. Wilson: Well, that sort of sets the tone, I guess, eh?

I'm pleased to spend the next 20 minutes making a few comments about the Emergency Management Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006, or Bill 56. Of course the long title of the act is An Act to amend the Emergency Management Act, the Employment Standards Act, 2000 and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

I just want to say as a general comment that I'm generally supportive of this legislation. Having been a former Minister of Health—thank God we didn't have SARS during my time, but certainly one of the first briefings I had, and I think one of the first briefings that any minister gets or should get, was what to do in case of an emergency, and that was back in 1995 to 1998, roughly.

Also, though, I did serve as Minister of Energy during the ice storm in 1999, in which I spent about three and a half weeks solid, beginning the day after the ice storm—as soon as we knew that it was bad—in eastern Ontario touring around the sites. I'm glad to compliment the Minister of Community Safety for what he did, and some member just complimented him for his response, even after a hip operation, to the Peterborough floods last year. But that's what you have to do. You have to be seen; you have to make decisions.

Clearly, there are parts of the province's emergency powers that do need to be adjusted because I can tell you that, during the ice storm, it was difficult to make a decision right on the spot. One of the decisions after the major crisis was over, for example, that I could make as energy minister, cost us about half a billion dollars, and that was, unlike the province of Quebec, that we decided to pay for the hydro poles in front of people's houses and the wires going to their hookup in their houses and barns. In other provinces during emergencies such as that, the precedent had been that the local farmer or homeowner had to pay for the wires going into the house from the roadside, which at times could cost several thousand of dollars for local homeowners.

That was something you could do as an energy minister under the old act, but it wasn't clear. I didn't have to have a conference call cabinet meeting, although we did have several from my cellphone getting a quorum of four people in cabinet, trying to make decisions on the spot so that we didn't have to come back to Toronto and convene a full cabinet. We did that several times, and I do agree under this legislation that the Premier or his designate will now be able to do that and that those orders will last for 72 hours, as I understand this legislation, and then be reviewable by cabinet. Cabinet has to either endorse the order for it to continue or change the order or cancel the order and make it null and void.

There are some safeguards, but I would say that there are some reservations, as the member for Nickel Belt pointed out: the nurses' association; Justice Archie Campbell, from whom I will quote in a moment. So this bill has to go to committee.

I'll say at the beginning that it's unfortunate—the minister did it again today. He did it back—and I just quote from Hansard—when this bill was introduced for first reading on December 15th, 2005. The minister, who normally is quite a gentleman, again today blames the opposition parties for slowing down or not bringing forward Bill 138, which is the predecessor draft legislation to this Bill 56. That's just not our recollection of what was happening. There were major concerns expressed, as the member for Nickel Belt just said, last year when this bill took the form of Bill 138, and the government wouldn't listen.

In fact, I'm going to quote my colleague from Leeds–Grenville, Mr. Runciman, who is our critic for community safety, and what he said on December 15 after the minister—you know, it's a heck of a way to make friends, when the first remarks you make are that the opposition has been slowing this process down. It kind of gets our backs up. Mr. Runciman said at the time, when the minister made the same accusation:

"I'll respond briefly to the Minister of Community Safety. It's truly unfortunate that he comes into the House today and suggests that the opposition parties were the cause of Bill 138 not being called for second reading. That is ludicrous, and anybody who knows the workings of the House knows it is ludicrous. In fact, our party offered to work in a collaborative way to come up with a government bill that addressed these urgent issues

in a timely manner, and that was rejected out of hand. There was never any response”—that is, from the government—“and then we get comments like we heard today from the Minister of Community Safety, which do a disservice to the members of this House and put the lie to the positions they’ve taken in the past with respect to an open and collaborative Legislative Assembly. It’s truly unfortunate.”

I know Mr. Runciman will speak at some point this afternoon, and I’m sure he’ll want to reiterate those comments for the record, because this is a bill that we’ve been trying to work on. We all know that avian flu could touch our continent at any time. That’s what is spurring the urgency of this legislation.

Nonetheless, it has such sweeping powers that we’ve not seen in Ontario before given to one person called the Premier. You just hope he’s responsible, but he hasn’t been responsible. There’s one other piece of legislation that comes to mind that has sweeping powers for the Premier, and that’s the Members’ Integrity Act, but he has never, ever imposed a penalty on his ministers who have funnelled money through their riding associations, of which they used to accuse Mr. Harris for golf memberships. Well, they’re doing it here all the time apparently, and get caught for it and refuse to even apologize for it. Or Mr. Takhar, who clearly—his blind trust of his transportation businesses and health care businesses has been in question, and in fact was the subject of a rather scathing report by this province’s Integrity Commissioner, Justice Coulter Osborne. The one guy who has all the power under that act to impose a penalty on cabinet ministers—it’s his duty under the law—refuses to exercise his duty under the law in a proper, responsible, fair and democratic way.

Mr. McGuinty is the Premier today, when this bill passes. He will be the Premier at least until October 2007. I hope he has a fair and reasonable approach to this legislation that gives him all the power, at least for brief periods of time. Certainly, with other legislation that is strictly his purview he has failed in the past.

I was just thinking back. I was a driver to George McCague back in the summer of 1985, George McCague being a former member for what was called Simcoe West back then, and Chair of Management Board for almost a decade under Premier Bill Davis, and was chairman of cabinet for the same decade under Premier Bill Davis. I certainly remember very well the tornado of 1985 in Barrie. In those days, cabinet ministers didn’t even get a briefing on their first day about the emergency role they would play. In fact, as I drove along—and George would kill me for telling you this—we had the Solicitor General in the back seat, we had me as a young driver for the summer, George in the front seat, and everybody was trying to read their emergency manual to see what their role was during that horrible tornado, which flattened big parts of the city of Barrie and certainly our riding of Simcoe West at the time.

I mentioned the eastern Ontario ice storm in 1999 and, of course, 9/11 in 2001. I can remember 9/11 in 2001. Thank goodness I had Judy Hubert with me, who was the

assistant deputy minister for energy at that time. We were actually at a federal-provincial conference in Quebec City at the Château Frontenac when that happened. I can remember that Ralph Goodale was chairing the conference, because he was energy minister along with natural resources at the time federally. I can remember going out for a washroom break and seeing a short replay—I guess it had happened a few seconds earlier—of the first plane going into one of the towers of the World Trade Center, and going back in and saying to Mr. Goodale, “I think we’ve got a problem here.” We certainly did have a problem. One of the problems we had was, the police weren’t clear what to do with a roomful of federal and provincial cabinet ministers, so they held us in the room for an hour while they made sure there were no terrorists outside of the hotel, because no one knew what was going on in those days.

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In the future, I think somebody needs the ability to override the police in those situations and say, “We’ve got duties to do, statutory duties,” particularly as energy minister, “to keep the lights on in New York City.” As people know, to this day—in fact, I got an award from the chamber of commerce, and I think they call it the board of trade there, one time when I was energy minister, because we sell power to New York City every noon hour and every dinner hour, and have for decades in this province. We provided their peak power and we still do. So one of the roles an energy minister has is to make sure that in something like a 9/11 situation the power still flows and that we actually curtail our power use here. So that involved our driving from Quebec City to Toronto, using the power that the minister had under the old act and phoning companies like Stelco and Inco and saying, “Shut down. We need your power on standby.”

So there is an active role for cabinet ministers and an active role for the Premier, and this attempt to revamp the laws is, I suppose, a good thing as long as you don’t go too far and impinge upon the civil liberties of Ontarians to an extent that it becomes ridiculous.

Certainly, we remember the power outage of 2003. We all remember SARS in 2003. Those were our only two official provincial emergencies ever declared. I mentioned the Peterborough flood. We’ve had northern Ontario floods, and we had the tornado, of course, in Mr. Arnott’s riding last year. Those are just some of the reasons why, of course, I agree with the government that they need powers to respond to these things that happen from time to time.

One of the criticisms of the bill is that this bill is all about giving more emergency powers to the province, but it gives nothing to emergency services personnel. No necessary equipment will be bought as a result of this bill passing. No new training is to be automatically provided, or funding for that, and no new education for emergency service personnel. That’s something the government will want to look at. I didn’t really hear whether the minister was sending this to committee, but he needs to send it to committee for a short period of time anyway so that some

of these groups that are directly affected and who we expect to—

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): He agreed.

Mr. Wilson: He agreed to send it to committee?

Mr. Marchese: Yes.

Mr. Wilson: So, for the record, it's going to committee.

These emergency service personnel obviously need the tools to do their job. There is a greater onus on them now than ever to work overtime and to follow whatever orders the Premier may issue in the early stages of an emergency. They have to have the tools to be able to do that.

One of the other criticisms of the bill is that there needs to be more of a focus on emergency planning rather than emergency powers. The bill contains nothing to help Ontario better coordinate emergency preparedness efforts.

Another criticism that has come up is that instead of raising its fees, because the Liberals are doing that on the police side, the Liberals should give the Ontario Police College a more significant role in emergency preparedness. The college currently offers no training in emergency management, which I found astounding when I first read this the other day, that the Ontario Police College doesn't have the funds to have the courses for our recruits. They don't get any training in emergency management. It's no one's fault, I guess. It's an oversight over the years. I didn't know about it and I've been here 16 years. So clearly something has to be done on that front.

Other key messages about this particular bill: Of course, we've said that it will grant extraordinary powers to the Premier and give the cabinet authority to override almost all Ontario laws when an emergency is declared. So it's not something that should be handled lightly. Proposed powers include the authority to compel anyone to disclose any kind of information it wants—the government takes this new power unto itself. People, particularly Progressive Conservatives, tend to want to hold personal information dear and near. Of course, the type of personal information we'll be talking about here is in many cases health information. If there is a disease outbreak, you may be forced to be tested for a disease. God forbid it be AIDS or something. That's not what's contemplated under here, but I'm sure there might be some AIDS groups that come forward saying, "Jeez, if you can do it during an emergency, there are other situations where you may declare a disease to be a pandemic or certainly a serious matter and you will start to compel people to give up their health records." So we need to make sure that's clarified under the act and that the government doesn't get the authority to go too far.

For instance, we do know—it's clearly stated in the bill—that citizens could be forced to be vaccinated against their will if there is a disease spreading into our area in which that would be required. So there may be some civil liberties people who have problems with that.

The government would have the power under this act to close down any public or private place that they deem necessary, prohibit travel and force the removal of a person's personal property. They can also regulate the use and distribution of goods and services, including water and electricity, and fix prices on goods and services, which the minister and I believe the parliamentary assistant spoke about. They gave the example of gas-gouging after a serious situation we had. I don't disagree with it on one hand; on the other hand, it is a pretty extraordinary power.

While proper planning for emergencies is imperative, this bill seems more about giving the government broad additional powers than proper emergency planning procedures. We've offered, as the PC caucus, to work in a collaborative way to improve this bill and address the issues that are being brought to us by some of the interest groups, and of course front-line workers themselves.

Just in talking about front-line workers, I want to commend my colleague Mr. Arnott for once again putting forward legislation that supports double-hatter firefighters. It seems to me that Mr. Kwinter is spending a great deal of time on this issue of emergency management—and that's good—but Mr. Arnott, myself and many others have brought to the attention of the minister the need to bring some fairness into this double-hatter firefighter situation. I've had it affect about four firefighters—I think the number is right, off the top of my head—who have had to leave their job in Springwater township over the last couple of years. I've met with their chief over this. They've had to leave their job, because they volunteer there during their five days off and their five days on. They either work in the city of Barrie or the city of Toronto Fire Services. Of course, they won't be participating in Springwater township if there is a need for emergency-measures people like firefighters because they're not allowed to volunteer anymore. Talk about a non-democracy. Because one union called the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, which is the firefighters' union, deems that they cannot work in their own communities, on their own time, they get fired, and no one on the government side—we're trying on this side of the House—will bring justice to these people and this issue.

What you do after 5 o'clock or after work in this country and in this province is your own darn business. I believe that. Whether someone wants to go door to door in a by-election and they're a public servant, that's fine, as long as they're not a senior public servant who is required under law to stay neutral. We certainly see that with some political parties and some of our public service unions. They regularly campaign for the NDP candidate, presumably after 5 o'clock, when they are no longer statutorily required to be at work here. But we don't let our firefighters have freedom on their own time. They have several days on and several days off, so they have time to do it.

I will note, though, that against this government, those who support Bill 44, the Volunteer Firefighters Employment Protection Act, are the Ontario Association of Fire

Chiefs, the Fire Fighters Association of Ontario, which is the umbrella group for the volunteer firefighters, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario—AMO—and Bernard Moyle. As the honourable member pointed out in his remarks a few minutes ago, Ontario's fire marshal very much supports this legislation.

I would ask the minister, while he is doing committee hearings on Bill 56, which is dealing with the emergency powers of the province, that he allow firefighters who want to help out in an emergency in their home community to volunteer to do that.

It also affects the township of Clearview in my riding. I know of one firefighter—and there might be two—who has had to quit because he works on the Toronto Fire Services. He's had to quit the New Tecumseh Fire Department, which is Alliston and area, because his union has said, "If you continue to volunteer back home in your own free and spare time, we will make it very rough for you in your full-time job with the Toronto Fire Services."

I think, first of all, that Mr. Arnott is to be commended, and the government should once again revisit that issue and stop saying no. To me, it's a no-brainer. At some point, someone has to stare down the union, and he hasn't had the courage to do it.

Having said that, there are some flaws in this legislation that need to be addressed. I said I would mention Justice Archie Campbell's comments. He was the investigating judge, as everyone knows, on the province's response to SARS. He stated that the power of the Premier and the cabinet in this legislation is "awesome." He noted, "It would literally give the provincial cabinet the authority to override any other ... laws when an emergency is declared."

Again we ask the government to send this to committee. I think you should deal with the double-hatter issue too. It's just a question of fairness.

I want to end on a balanced story from the Barrie Examiner, which is the paper read up my way, of Wednesday January 4, 2006. It said, referring to this legislation, "The question is whether Ontario's Premier really needs 'extraordinary' powers during an emergency." It goes on to say that this needs to be clarified. Does he really need to see personal health records? Does he really need to restrict travel? Does he really need to force people to have vaccinations or inoculations against their will? It raises questions, but it also gives Mr. Kwinter the benefit of the doubt in saying that maybe at certain times you have to suspend individual rights, but it notes that you shouldn't be doing that for a prolonged period of time. The safeguards in this legislation need to be clarified so that the public understands what their rights are during an emergency and what their rights aren't.

I look forward to the brief comments from my colleagues, and I look forward later this afternoon to our critic Mr. Runciman's comments.

1630

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: Let me follow up on concerns that were raised by the member for Simcoe-Grey, specifically with

respect to emergency services personnel. He noted there's nothing in the bill that provides funding for emergency services, be they fire, be they police, by they paramedics, and certainly no money for training; no training in many cases was even available for new recruits in some of these emergency professions. That's the first problem: There's nothing in the bill that addresses funding to ensure that folks involved in emergency preparedness are actually appropriately and adequately trained.

Secondly, there was a serious concern raised during the course of the hearings the committee had about whether or not emergency services—fire, paramedics, police—actually had the human capacity available to deal with emergencies. There were clear concerns expressed by the OPP, by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, by the EMS specifically that in the event of an emergency they didn't feel they had the surge capacity that would be necessary to actually deal with a full-scale emergency and the planning and the response that had to go with all of that. I don't see any response in this bill about ongoing work by the government with respect to dealing with that very difficult issue. It's one thing for the province to have plans. It's one thing for the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor to be able to order a number of things. It's an entirely different matter to have the personnel on the ground in the broad range of emergency services to actually respond to crises. Many groups that came before the committee made it clear that those resources were not in place.

So as we deal with the bill that sets in place what powers the government has to deal with emergency services, we'd also better be dealing very carefully with, what is the surge capacity and what are the human resources we need to appropriately respond?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to say a few words about Bill 56. I want to commend the minister and the staff for bringing forward this bill. I think Bill 56 is an important bill. One needs only to look at what has happened in the United States, at what happened recently with Katrina and the hurricane situation there. I was watching that on television, as probably most people were periodically. You see the mayor of New Orleans get up and blame the Governor of the state. The Governor, in turn, blames the President. The President turns around and blames FEMA, the organization that was set up to deal with emergencies. So it's a vicious cycle of blame.

I think what the bill here today does is set the responsibility square on the Lieutenant Governor in Council and the Premier, which is basically the Premier and the cabinet. It allows them the power to deal with emergency situations, should they occur. We hope that something of that nature would never happen here, but if something ever did happen, the first question that would be asked is, "Who is in charge?" The second question would be, "What are they doing about it?" You know, there are so many attempts to organize and prepare and do things properly, but when that emergency actually hits, the last thing you want to do is to be pointing the finger at

somebody else. You don't want in Ontario, if there's a problem, for the Premier to be saying, "Well, the Prime Minister should be here," and the Prime Minister turning around and saying, "Well, there should be some emergency coordinating power or organization out there"—or perhaps the mayor or another group—dealing with the problem, the Red Cross and so on.

This legislation makes it clear. It provides a comprehensive strategy for emergency powers. Making Ontario's legislation consistent with modern emergency powers legislation in other provinces and other jurisdictions is worthwhile. It's the right thing to do at the right time, and I'm pleased to stand and support the bill here today.

Mr. Arnott: I'm pleased to have a moment this afternoon to respond to the important presentation that was made by the member for Simcoe-Grey. First of all, I want to inform the House that the member for Simcoe-Grey will be celebrating his 43rd birthday next week, and I happen to know that the member for Nickel Belt will be celebrating her birthday as well next week. We'll just leave it at that.

I thought the member for Simcoe-Grey made quite a number of good points. Obviously, he does an excellent job, as an experienced member of this Legislature, pointing out some of the important aspects of this bill and relating some of his experience as Minister of Energy in the late 1990s, when the province did in fact face a very severe crisis because of the terrible ice storm that affected eastern Ontario most specifically.

The member also made reference to my efforts to bring forward the private member's bill in support of double-hatter firefighters, and for that I thank him. When my original Bill 30 was before the Ontario Legislature in 2002, I don't think there was another member of the Legislature who was more supportive of the idea of double-hatter firefighters being allowed to continue to serve as firefighters in their own hometowns and small communities that they live in, and I very much appreciated that.

Getting back to what the minister had indicated in his opening speech this afternoon, of course the standing orders provide for questions and comments so that members can ask questions of ministers and provide comments. I asked two questions in response to his speech. I asked him why Ontario and Newfoundland are the only provinces in Canada that don't have protection for double-hatter firefighters, and I also asked him why the government continues to ignore their own fire marshal, who continues to ask for support for double-hatter firefighters in legislation. The minister ignored both of those questions and was not forthcoming whatsoever with an answer. I will continue to raise these issues and ask him why those questions were not answered.

But I want to thank once again the member from Simcoe-Grey for his eloquent presentation this afternoon.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East): I commend the Minister of Community Safety for taking these great

strides to protect the people of Ontario. In this world, we often talk about "the new normal." We have had many narrow escapes from great tragedy—the Mississauga train derailment, the ice storm, SARS, the blackout—and we've been very lucky that we have had great leadership.

But what we don't want to do is rely on luck. We want to make sure that we have a policy in place, a process in place, that will assure the security and safety of the people of Ontario when some unforeseen disaster strikes us. Appointing the Commissioner of Emergency Management, bringing in people like Dr. Sheela Basrur, the chief medical officer of health, and looking at a comprehensive strategy to address any emergency that may take place have been very prudent and proactive steps by this minister to make sure that we are ready. This is all about readiness.

With that, we wanted to make sure that we work with all parties—this is a non-partisan issue—that we all come together as a family here in Ontario, and as elected officials, to make sure we can deliver that safety and security for the people of Ontario. This piece of legislation has the checks and balances in place that make the government accountable for its actions should it be necessary to declare a provincial emergency.

1640

In Bill 56, we also provide the authority to the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make emergency orders. So things like restricting travel or what happened during SARS in terms of quarantining people, all of these are measures that must be available to the government to protect our people.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Simcoe-Grey, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilson: I want to thank the member for Nickel Belt, who mentioned that there is no money for training, and that's something that police, fire and EMS personnel—paramedic officers—want to bring to the attention of the government.

The member for Scarborough Southwest made a very good point that, when there is an emergency, the public needs to be clear on who is in charge and who is to do what. This legislation and the debate around it will help with that.

The member for Waterloo-Wellington, my friend Mr. Arnott, forgot to mention when he mentioned Ms. Martel's birthday and mine that he's four days younger, and he had the distinction of being the youngest member before us. I guess Shelley had it first, and then probably Ted by four days. Anyway, it was many years ago. Many people have beaten our records since, in other Parliaments, in this Parliament and in the federal Parliament.

The member for Mississauga East says there are checks and balances, speaking on the government side. That's what we want to be careful about. There are people out there more up on civil liberties legislation throughout the world who would argue that there aren't very many checks and balances.

I note that the Premier's order can stand for 72 hours and then he has to go to cabinet. Well, most Premiers see

their advisers and cabinet and can usually sway their advisers and cabinet to their own way. So I'm not sure that's a real check and balance, going back to your cabinet whom you appointed.

You don't have to come to Parliament for quite a long period of time under this legislation. We may want to tighten that up. There's no reason why you can't get leaders of the parties in here together on a conference call during an emergency or in some way. If you're the leader of a party or you're a minister or even some of our critics, we know where they are all the time, 24 hours a day, in case things do come up. So there must be a way in this day and age to consult with the other parties and make sure that when an emergency is declared, the government is on the right track.

With that, I thank the members for their comments.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Marchese: I would like to have unanimous consent to stand down our lead from the member for Niagara Centre.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina has requested unanimous consent to stand down the lead. Do we have unanimous consent? Agreed.

Mr. Marchese: What I want to do is point out a number of problems with the bill. While it is true that there are a number of things we probably agree with, we know that our critic has a lot of disagreement with this bill, and we want him to have this opportunity, obviously, to put them on the record. But having the opportunity to be here today, I want to begin that debate by repeating something that the member from Nickel Belt said in her two-minute response, and that is that the SARS Commission's second report was highly critical of Bill 138. This is what the commission's report said: "The essence of the commission's concern is that the unusual process of proceeding to a draft bill of such profound legal importance, without prior policy and operational analysis by departments of government and without prior legal and constitutional scrutiny by the Attorney General, deprived the bill of the solid underpinnings that ordinarily precede the development of any important piece of legislation ... a sober second thought is now required."

In so doing or in so saying, the minister today, in response, said that Justice Campbell's criticism was merely a matter of speaking to process. Well, it isn't just process that Justice Campbell spoke to. He spoke to many other things that are simply not addressed in this bill. When the minister spoke today, he made it appear—in fact, he said that the bulk of Justice Campbell's concerns had been addressed. Well, I want to begin the list that shows that the concerns have not been addressed, and that is why we, as well as the Tories, I am hearing, are calling for hearings, because we want people to have an opportunity not just to address Justice Campbell's concerns, but hopefully the concerns that will be raised by the front-line emergency professionals, who I know have raised many of the concerns before and I suspect will repeat them again when the hearings on this bill begin.

On the whole matter of voluntary compliance, a lesson from SARS is that advanced planning for health emergency compensation is vital. A recent US study also showed that fear of loss of income was the number one barrier to voluntary compliance with emergency orders. We know that although that is the number one barrier, there are a number of other impediments that have been identified. They talk about poor logistical support, psychological stress, spotty monitoring of compliance, inconsistencies in the application of quarantine measures between various jurisdictions, and problems with public communications.

The SARS Commission report recommended that any emergency legislation require that every government emergency plan provide a basic blueprint for the most predictable types of compensation packages and that they be ready for use, with appropriate tailoring, immediately following any declaration of emergency. Bill 56 does not address this adequately. The bill does set out conditions under which employees are entitled to a leave of absence without pay in emergencies. I remind people that a leave of absence without pay doesn't quite satisfy one of the problems that has been identified by Justice Campbell. So we need to review this, and I suspect that there will be a number of people who will speak to this whole issue of voluntary compliance and how we deal with it based on the recommendations put forth by Justice Campbell. So this is one measure that has not been dealt with adequately at all.

On the whole matter of prevention, preparedness and co-operation: Without preparedness, emergency powers are of little use. Specific emergency plans are required for specific threats. Generic plans are not enough. The SARS Commission report made several recommendations regarding coordinated emergency plans: Ensure the integration of all emergency plans; require that every emergency plan specify clearly who is in charge and who does what; clarify rules around administration of and compensation for seized property; and clarify the legal effects of emergency powers. Bill 56 does not address this adequately. It leaves the implementation of any emergency plans formulated to cabinet orders without specifying much in the way of further requirements. Simply leaving this matter to cabinet orders is not a plan.

Already we have two matters dealing with voluntary compliance and with prevention, preparedness and co-operation, and the government, through this bill, does not deal with it. This is not a matter of process; this is a matter of detail that the minister has not addressed. Maybe he will think about addressing these matters while we're doing the review of this bill in committee. Maybe we will have to persuade him to do this in the course of it. We will see.

The role of the chief medical officer of health: The most important thing in a public health emergency is public confidence that the medical decisions are made by a trusted, independent medical leader such as the chief medical officer of health, free of any bureaucratic or political pressures. Mr. Campbell's recommendation was

that emergency legislation should provide that the chief medical officer of health has clear primary authority with respect to the public health aspects of every provincial emergency, including:

- public health emergency planning;
- public communication of health risk, necessary precautions, regular situation updates;
- advice to the government as to whether an emergency should be declared, if the emergency presents at first as a public health problem;
- strategic advice to the government in the management of the emergency;
- advice to the government as to whether an emergency should be declared to be over, and emergency orders lifted, in respect of the public health measures taken to fight the emergency;
- advice to the government in respect of emergency orders of a public health nature and emergency orders that affect public health, e.g. ensuring that gasoline rationing does not deprive hospitals of emergency supplies;
- delegated authority in respect of emergency orders of a public health nature; and
- such further and other authority, of a nature consistent with the authority referred to above, in respect of the public health aspects of any emergency.

1650

Under Bill 56, the Commissioner of Emergency Management appears to be given primacy in all emergency situations, and there is no requirement for the two offices to exercise their authority in consultation with each other. We are reading here that the Commissioner of Emergency Management is given primacy in all emergency situations, contrary to what Justice Campbell was recommending, and that is that the chief medical officer of health ought to have clear primary authority with respect to the long list of issues that I have raised. So here we have another example that doesn't speak to the issue of process but speaks to the issue of content, and the government has not fixed that with the introduction of Bill 56. I have an ongoing list of points that I will be raising that speak to the fact that perhaps the bulk of the measures recommended by Justice Campbell have not been dealt with.

There's another matter of the power to override Ontario laws. Bill 138 contained an override power which stated that orders under the emergency management legislation prevail over other rules. The SARS Commission report recommended that the government amend the override power in order to:

- clarify whether the override power affects collective agreements;
- protect our foundational legal statutes such as the Human Rights Code etc. against emergency override;
- clarify whether a journalist or lawyer who refuses to disclose confidential information or the identity of their source is liable to the penalties provided; and
- clarify that the override power does not constitute a constitutionally impermissible delegation of legislative power to public officials.

The report also recommended that the override power be given a more prominent place in the statute by putting it right after the enumerated powers.

Bill 56 does not amend the override provisions in Bill 138, nor does it give it more prominence in the statute. There is no mention of collective agreements and no evidence of legal analysis undertaken to ensure constitutionality. With respect to personal information, the section on offences now limits the uses of personal information during an emergency and clarifies that the FOI legislation applies as soon as the emergency is declared over. Here's another matter that is substantive in nature—nothing to do with process—that has not been dealt with by the minister or his bill.

Further, Bill 138, as it relates to the power to implement emergency plans: The SARS Commission report argued that under Bill 138, the power to implement emergency plans is at best ambiguous and at worst lacking in transparency. Arguably, what the provision really provides, through the opaque technique of incorporation by reference, is a series of blank cheques which authorize public officials to do anything they see fit so long as it is written down in some plan."

The report therefore recommended that the power be amended to (1) ensure that it confers no hidden powers other than those explicitly set out in Bill 138, and (2) provide that every emergency plan requires protocols for safe and speedy court access developed in consultation with the judiciary, and that the Courts of Justice Act be amended to ensure an early hearing for any proceeding under or in respect of emergency legislation or any action taken under it.

The same blanket wording applies in Bill 56. No amendments have been made. There may be some changes that may be addressed in Bill 14 to deal with this, but we haven't seen it ourselves. Perhaps the minister will clarify in the hearings, when they are going to be held, as it relates to this particular issue. But again, these matters are substantive in nature; they are not simply a matter of process.

There are other issues I wanted to raise connected to the problems of concurrent powers, occupational health and safety, and the trigger, criteria and limitations, but I want to touch on other matters as well before I complete my 20 minutes. Those have to do with the problems of the front-line emergency professionals and what this bill does to address their concerns. That is why we believe it needs to go to committee, because we believe front-line emergency professionals and their needs are not dealt with in this bill. We believe that if the government is serious about emergency management, it must invest in the front lines.

The bill does not address this at all. During the review of emergency management statutes, the EMS, the OPP, the Ontario Fire Marshal's office and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police all noted that they lacked significant surge capacity throughout the province. Nothing in this bill addresses any of the concerns that have been put forth by all of these various people.

There are chronic staff shortages at 11 provincially operated central ambulance communication centres and at the medical air transportation centre, where the new-hire retention rate is just 30%. Try managing a regional health crisis or a major disaster with understaffed dispatch centres. This bill does not address this and the minister has not spoken to these concerns at all. Talk about meat inspectors overworked and under serious stress, they have a turnover rate of over 30%. The turnover speaks to the problem we are having, not just with meat inspectors, but with the medical air transportation centre staff and the 11 provincially operated central ambulance communication centres. If this is true, as indeed we believe it is, we've got a problem that the minister needs to address and that this bill should be speaking to.

The public health labs have been aggressively starved after the layoff of scientists responsible for researching infectious diseases, superbugs and chemical toxins. Because of this, it took two years for Ontario to respond to the West Nile virus.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri (Etobicoke North): Superbugs?

Mr. Marchese: Superbugs, Doctor. Perhaps you heard something else? I thought maybe you wanted to speak to the whole issue of superbugs, but perhaps you may want to speak to some other issues as well.

1700

These are concerns that affect the front-line staff, and when we're speaking about emergency management statute law amendments, front-line emergency professionals are affected by it. They are the people we need to speak to. Their needs have to be dealt with, because in speaking to their needs, we're speaking to how we protect the public on a regular basis and not just when emergencies happen. This is why this bill has to go to committee. We're happy to hear that the minister obviously wants to send it there, and we know that he's not simply sending it there so that we can talk about process. Clearly the minister has spoken to the issue of process and, yes, he has made sure that consultation has happened with various groups. But what we have spoken to today says that Justice Campbell has raised many issues that Bill 55 has not addressed, or not addressed adequately. As a result of that, we feel the bill needs to have a thorough review. It needs to have professionals come to speak to it in order to make it a much more effective bill. As much as the minister says, "We are in a hurry to do this," we say, "Yes, we are, but we also need to do it well and to do it right and to make sure that we correct the failings and the shortcomings of the bill."

With that in mind, I hope the minister, the parliamentary assistant and the most attentive Liberal backbenchers watching me here as I speak will do the right thing and hopefully make sure that some of the amendments that Justice Campbell has proposed are brought forth by those members who are on the committee, if not by the minister.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I was listening carefully to the member for Trinity-Spadina

about the negative approach to Bill 56. By the way, it's Bill 56, not 55. I think it's a very important step toward putting the house in order. It gives the ability to the government, which is, in the end, responsible for the security and protection of the people of Ontario.

I was listening to many speakers in the House talking about this bill, some of them in support, some not. But I hope in the end, after the debate is finished, all the members should be in support, because it's a good thing to do. We've witnessed in this province many incidents. We had SARS, we had the blackout, we had Walkerton. We've had many different incidents happen in the province of Ontario. So the government, which is supposed to be, in the end, responsible for the protection of the people, should have a mechanism in place in order to act when this problem happens. It's important for our government to get that permission from this place in order to act when an emergency happens in Ontario, in order to protect the great people of this province.

I think it's an important thing, so I want to congratulate the minister and the government for bringing this bill forward in order to establish some kind of mechanism to protect the people of this great province, like, for instance, prohibiting travel, protecting hospitals, protecting people when they declare an emergency, when they cannot come to work, buying food, penalizing people who don't respond to the emergency declarations, and so many different issues.

We cannot leave the whole thing open when the incidents happen. We understand the people of the province because we care about the people of this province. That's why, at a good time like this time, we have to think and put something forward.

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): It's always a pleasure to rise and comment to my friend and colleague the member for Trinity-Spadina, who always has an important message and does so in a very interesting manner.

I share some of—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: It may not have been his most stellar, but even when he brings his B game, it's an A game, I think, by anybody else's standards.

I do share some of the concerns that the member has brought forward. That's why I think it's essential for further consideration of Bill 56 at committee. I appreciate the original process. It's too bad the original process did not bear fruit, but we do hope that this will go back to committee.

Certainly, in times of crisis, it's important that cabinet have the ability to respond. We lived through some very challenging times in 2003 with both SARS and the power blackout, and I was pleased to be part of a government that responded very aggressively to those challenges. Having been there, I understand the importance of having some degree of emergency power to address those issues. We must always also ensure that the balance is there as well to protect civil liberties, to make sure that cabinet does not abuse those powers and that those powers are rescinded as soon as possible.

One thing I would also like to mention, coming from Fort Erie, being born and raised there, is that Fort Erie border issues are already a concern today and, I worry, are going to become an increasing concern with the new passport requirements coming soon. We always boast about the largest unprotected border in the world between Canada and the United States. Sadly, that's really no longer true. It has increasingly become a fortress.

I want to give particular plaudits to the Niagara Regional Police. During the SARS crisis and terrorism concerns and others, they responded very well in assisting the customs officers at the border. The challenge the regional police have is that they often act as an international force, whether it's at the border, patrolling the lakes or the Niagara River. As Chief Wendy Southall of Niagara has commented, as well as Chair Peter Partington, they're not compensated for those activities by either the federal or the provincial government. In fact, Chief Southall's reaction to last week's budget noted that, while there was an increase in funding for Toronto's police—and we are all very concerned about gun crime in the city of Toronto and across the province—perhaps similar consideration should be given to the Niagara Regional Police force to deal with crises at the border, along two Great Lakes and the Niagara River. I hope that's part of the consideration as the minister moves forward with this bill.

Thank you for the additional time, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Martel: The member from Trinity-Spadina raised those concerns that remain outstanding. He did that because the minister, during the course of his remarks, said that many of the provisions of the previous bill, Bill 138, have been carried over into Bill 56, and he's right about that. Many of those provisions were provisions that Justice Archie Campbell was extremely critical of, which have not been addressed, which have not been dealt with. He named at least 10, and when I get a chance to speak on this bill, I'm going to name a few more. These come directly from the justice's work on SARS. I appreciate that we have a second bill and a second version, but the problem is that the second version has many flaws too. Those need to be addressed and those need to be dealt with.

I was pleased to hear that the minister said he was open for the bill to go to committee. I think that has to happen in this case. There are ongoing concerns that have been raised by a number of health care professionals in terms of how they feel they will be implicated, but I think there are concerns that have to do with the quite enormous power that Justice Campbell also talked about that need to be addressed.

My colleague from Simcoe-Grey, during the course of his remarks, read into the record quotes that were made in the media by the justice with respect to the powers of the Premier and cabinet in declaring an emergency. He said those powers were awesome. I don't think that was a positive point of view. I think he had serious concerns about just how excessive those powers are. Those things need to be addressed.

We asked Justice Campbell to do extensive work, looking at the fallout from SARS and what needed to be done. He did extensive work, and now it's time for us to incorporate his recommendations into emergency plans and to ensure that the concerns he has around declaring an emergency are also addressed. These things haven't been dealt with yet.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to join the debate on this bill because, coming from Mississauga, it brings to mind an event in the fall of 1979 when a train carrying toxic chemicals and flammable substances derailed in what is now central Mississauga. At that time, the evacuation of tens of thousands of people was accomplished without panic and without death or injury. In fact, it was and still is called the Mississauga miracle. At the time, a feisty new mayor named Hazel McCallion ran for days on virtually no sleep, but never missed a meeting.

1710

Many of the things the world learned about how to do it right in disaster planning and how to do it better came out of the Mississauga miracle of 1979. Those lessons and what was built on them now form some of the basis of Bill 56. This bill says to every Ontario municipality and every large corporation that handles, ships or produces hazardous or flammable substances that you now have the framework you need to lay your contingency plans and then to test them.

Some people have said, "Well, you know, there are still flaws in this." It brings to mind, from my former occupation, an adage of software development that goes like this: "Perfection is the enemy of the good." In this case, we're not looking for perfection. We're looking for a bill that enables municipalities and corporations to do the things they need to do now to be ready for an eventuality that may, and they hope won't, happen.

It's a good bill. It's got a good set of checks and balances. It gives government and corporations the tools and the authority they need. This is the sort of legislation that municipalities, the people who live within them, corporations and the people they serve, hope they never need to use, but if used as a planning tool, Bill 56 is the type of legislation that's going to make the difference between order and chaos, life or death.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Trinity-Spadina, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Marchese: In response to the members from London-Fanshawe and Mississauga West, we are not disputing the need to have these emergency powers. That's not the issue. Nor do we simply want to pat ourselves on the back as government members, I would hope, simply for having introduced a bill, which is what the member from London-Fanshawe does. I don't think it should be enough for us to do that.

The member from Mississauga West simply says we are not looking for perfection. I don't understand why he would say that, because our job as legislators is to try to find the best possible answers to the questions everyone is raising; in this particular case, the questions raised by

Justice Campbell. It seems to me that it's my job and his to take advantage of the fact that this bill is going to go to committee, and when it goes to committee, it is my job and the job of the members from Mississauga West and London-Fanshawe to try to improve on the bill that has been presented by the minister, not simply to send it to committee and say, "We've got a perfect bill. We can't make it any more perfect." It's not what we should be doing. It speaks poorly of you, us, as politicians, if we say that.

The reason we send bills to committee is to hear from deputants, to hear from our critics; in this particular case, Justice Campbell, the person we haven't listened to properly in our response with Bill 56, to be able to then say, "We've had an opportunity. We've listened. We want to make improvements that we can make so that this bill can be the best that can be presented." I hope that would be the job of all of us in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth-Middlesex): I am actually delighted to engage in the debate on Bill 56.

We live in a dream called Ontario, but this bill contemplates a nightmare, the nightmare of a provincial emergency. We're not talking about a local emergency. We're talking about an emergency that deals with the entire province. We are talking about a nightmarish day in this province. The question is: As legislators, will we ensure there are sufficient powers so that we can exercise our duty as those who are elected to protect our fellow citizens? Is that not our chief job in a nightmarish scenario? It is to defend life.

There is much accountability and balance in this bill, and I'll talk about that shortly. But let us never fail to deal with the central question: Are we adequately prepared? As the minister said, we are the only province in this country that does not have a modern emergency management bill, so it is time for action.

The reason I asked to speak on that, as it's been referenced, is that I thought the minister was very wise in sending the question of how to modernize our emergency management in this province to a select committee made up of all parties. There were some wonderful members on that whom I gained a great deal of respect for during that process, because though I was not on that committee, I was occasionally seconded onto that committee to deal with specific concerns dealing with agriculture. I distinctly remember the debates we had—I know the person who is now my minister, the Honourable Laurel Broten, I know the member from Willowdale, I know the member from Guelph-Wellington—and the discussions we had. I don't remember in that all-party select committee there ever being anybody from the third party who came to those meetings, despite the invitation. I found that compelling. I think that is why the minister has said that if we are not going to have everybody in this House or in a select committee dealing with this issue, and we're going to abrogate our responsibilities because we're not getting exactly what we want, then the minister has no choice but to introduce a government bill that has taken

into consideration the deliberations of our select committee on Bill 138 and to introduce Bill 56. That's why we're where we are today.

The one thing I learned is that in this type of nightmare situation, time is of the essence. That is what we never have enough of in an emergency—our ability to respond quickly and decisively. There is no time for dithering, there's no time for second guessing and there sure is no time to write a new piece of legislation while people's lives are in danger. It falls upon us as legislators, after due deliberation, to move swift afoot and ensure that the government of the day has the powers necessary to protect human life, because that, at the essence, is what this bill is all about. After the briefings I received, being on that select committee—and I know other members from all parties received—the types of scenarios that were contemplated by those people who are professionals, who deal in this area of emergency management at the provincial or national level, are disturbing to say the least. We can shun away from that disturbing reality or we can embrace it and deal with it, and that's what this bill is all about. It is about making sure that we can be swift afoot.

The bill always has to deal with the issue of balancing an individual's rights, which we enjoy each and every day because there is no provincial emergency, with the collective right that we have as a community to protect human life when there is an emergency.

I want to put on the record quite clearly, as the minister stated, that most emergencies in this province are municipal or regional. Some 97% of all municipalities in this province now, as mandated by the government, have emergency measures. I can tell you that the experience of my good friend the member from Peterborough and my experience of the drinking water advisory in my hometown of Stratford show how very important it is that we have the ability to respond at the local level when there is a local emergency—and they were indeed emergencies. When people are flooded out of their homes and businesses, when 30,000 people cannot drink the water from their tap, that is an emergency. I want to commend the municipalities that have worked so hard to prepare; but surely it falls upon us as the provincial Legislature to be ready in the event of a provincial emergency. The minister was absolutely right to note two examples, the hydro blackout and SARS, two emergencies that fell back-to-back and which, I think, have convinced most of us in this House—maybe not all, but most—of the need for us to take action.

I just want to be clear. The member from Trinity-Spadina, whom I respect, is referencing the Campbell report, and that is a valid point, but he is talking about a specific situation. This bill is not about dealing with specific situations. The entire point of the bill is that it doesn't deal with specific situations. "Well, we'll be ready if we can appropriately contemplate every nightmare scenario." That's not the way to write a bill. The way to do it is to make sure that the powers are sufficient, that they are there, that they can be accessed, that the

government of the day is held accountable for its actions once the emergency is over, and that there is no carte blanche given to the government for an unending period of time for them to deal with an emergency. They have to come back into this House and be accountable to the people for their actions.

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In regard to pandemic planning, we on this side of the House are very proud that Dr. Sheela Basrur is the chief medical officer of health for this province. She and her team, and people in health units and in the medical community right across this province, have been dealing with one, but one very disturbing, nightmarish scenario, that of a pandemic. This bill is not about that, sir. Dr. Basrur and her people are doing their good work. This bill is about having the powers that can be invoked, when necessary, for a provincial emergency. It doesn't absolve everybody else in the government from doing their job, just like Dr. Basrur is doing.

I can't go by without mentioning that the member from Simcoe-Grey was talking about some lack of commitment from this side of the House in regard to our brave firefighting professionals and volunteers in this province. Last year, it was our government that was able to provide some \$30 million of one-time assistance to fire departments so they could focus on the training and the equipment that they need. Just the other day in my own riding, there was a fire in Milverton. They had thermal imaging equipment which, in my opinion, was able to save lives. That equipment is there because we made a commitment to the firefighters—professional and volunteer—right across this province that as a government we would assist them, that we would provide the funding so that they would be adequately trained and that they would have state-of-the-art equipment, because their lives and the brave work that they do are valuable to this government.

I also want to note, and perhaps the member from Simcoe-Grey was not aware of this, that we have the heavy urban search and rescue that is completely in the purview of the province, and as well that we have a team that deals with chemical, biological and radioactive/nuclear concerns. As I said, chemical, radioactive, biological. These are the nightmare scenarios that we cannot shun. We cannot cast our eyes away from this problem. We have to deal with it in the light of day, because it is not wise of us as legislators to somehow ignore this, or to participate in what I would consider to be endless dithering if we're not all in agreement in this House that we must move this piece of legislation forward. That is very important to me, as someone who had a chance to be on that select committee.

I want the good people of Ontario to know that we are fortunate to have, in my opinion, Minister Kwinter. I think he brings a certain wisdom to this House because of his long tenure here, and I think he's got it right. We cannot let the forces of inertia and dithering take us away from what our objective is as legislators, which is, at the end of the day, to protect human health in the event of a

provincial emergency. That's why I'm supporting this bill, and I urge all of the members opposite and my government colleagues to support this bill. It is an important piece of legislation whose time has come.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I am pleased to add some comments on the speech made by the member from Perth-Middlesex on Bill 56, which is the Emergency Management Statute Law Amendment Act. It's a bill that was introduced on December 15 by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and it affects the Emergency Management Act, the Employment Standards Act, 2000, and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.

This bill would grant extraordinary powers to the Premier, and it gives the cabinet authority to override almost all Ontario laws when an emergency is declared. Obviously, that is something that I would have concerns with.

It also has proposed powers that include the authority to compel anyone to disclose any kind of information it wants and force citizens to be vaccinated against spreading an illness. It also would give the government the power to close down any public or private place that they deem necessary, prohibit travel and force the removal of a person's personal property. These, obviously, are quite extraordinary powers.

It would also regulate the use and distribution of goods and services, including water and electricity, and fix the prices on goods and services. These are very broad powers. They very well may be too broad. So with a bill like this, which is, I'm sure, necessary, there obviously needs to be a real balance, and it will be more important than ever that we get public input from those involved in the health field, from the police, from emergency workers, from the public at large, so that we can get the right balance between giving the powers necessary in an emergency situation, but not taking any rights away that we don't want to take away.

Ms. Martel: I've heard some comments now about the urgency of moving this bill forward, and I want to remind members that we've had a commitment from the minister to have this bill go back for public hearings. He made that comment in the context of acknowledging that there are health care providers who would be called upon to act in emergencies, to implement emergency plans, and that these health care providers continue to have concerns. So the bill is going to committee. I appreciate that the minister is going to do that, and I would urge all of us to make sure that that is a process whereby the concerns that we are bringing forward in a legitimate fashion can be raised.

I want to remind members as well that the concerns that we are bringing forward relate to concerns that have been expressed by Justice Archie Campbell, who had a chance to look at the wording of Bill 138. The critique that was presented by my colleague from Trinity-Spadina was a critique of Bill 138 and the provisions in

that bill, and concerns were expressed by the justice about those.

The minister said in his opening comments today that many of the provisions of Bill 138 are now in Bill 56. If that is the case, I would have hoped that the concerns that had already been expressed by Justice Campbell would have been addressed, and we don't think that they have been. That's clearly why we are talking about the concerns that were raised with Bill 138 and whether or not they have been dealt with in Bill 56. We're pointing out those areas where those concerns that have been raised have not been dealt with.

It seems to me that we should be benefiting from the experience and the expertise of Justice Campbell. After all, he did head up a commission looking at SARS, what happened, the fallout, and what we can do to ensure that we don't have such a situation again. He's made some recommendations. I hope that during the committee process we look at those recommendations and move the amendments necessary to do this right.

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot): I know the member from Perth-Middlesex very well. Not only are we seatmates, but we're friends, and we spent a fair bit of time talking to each other about the kinds of obligations and responsibilities we have in this place. I know that he understands that being an elected representative, particularly one who's been given the task to speak to a responsibility as awesome as the responsibilities that are contemplated in this legislation, it's something that we can't shy away from.

The time to plan for those dark days when people are cursing the darkness clearly are days when the sun is shining, when you've got time to think about some of the exigencies that might be there. I think the member from Perth-Middlesex was quite exemplary in his prudence describing the situation and the need for us to prepare for that eventuality where we, in addition to sharing one another's joys, may have to share some of the awesome burdens that we experience.

The bill—and the member speaks well to this—would allow the government to ensure that resources are available, that price gouging isn't something that would happen, that in public places contagion of disease or other traumas can be controlled, and transportation resources needed to respond can be in place. Public hearings will be held ostensibly to improve the bill. I think the member has put the case for this bill very well.

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Mr. Hudak: I also enjoyed the comments by the member from Perth-Middlesex. I particularly enjoyed the metaphysical interpretation of his remarks by the member for Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Aldershot. I'm going to have to review those comments and enjoy the light of day that comes after raging against the darkness, sir, but it was a particular comment.

I had spoken a bit earlier about the concerns in representing a border community and about the good work the Niagara Regional Police do in support of the federal

government, the RCMP and customs officers, as well as helping us on provincial issues, as when trucks were backing up at the border around the time of the SARS crisis, and the unfortunate terrorism attacks that have happened in the United States, in Great Britain and in other places that will often cause increased security at our borders.

I want to say, while I'm speaking on border issues, that I am pleased to hear the Conservative government, federally, is going to move forward with the notion of arming our customs officers. Having had the chance to work as a customs inspector to help pay for university and then full-time for a short time, I always felt there should be a greater concentration on the law enforcement side and on interdicting the transference of firearms, drugs and other contraband. Unfortunately, in the past, there has been too much of a concentration on customs officers as glorified tax collectors. I'm pleased to see a greater enforcement role now being taken up by the government that will recognize the very dangerous job these women and men perform.

On that topic, I know my colleague Mr. Runciman is going to speak soon. One concept that he had championed for some time and that I'd like to see back on the stage is the notion of a North American security perimeter. I am very worried about a growing gap at our borders. I would like to see us work with the United States and Mexico toward a North American security perimeter concept. I'm sure my colleague will talk about that in more detail.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Perth-Middlesex has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Wilkinson: I want to thank my good friend the member from Parry Sound-Muskoka for his comments. I say to him with all due respect that I think all of us are going to have to take a look at the vast implications of this bill. Its time has come. I think we agree it's necessary for this piece of legislation. I say to my friend from Nickel Belt that I know you are reassured that the minister will refer this matter and the points raised to committee. To my metaphysical seatmate, the member from ADFA, I appreciate the support for those of us with one little candle in the dark. The member from Erie-Lincoln has raised many good points about border security.

I want to conclude by saying, did you know that if there is a provincial emergency, people can gouge their neighbour for prices because there is no law that says that's illegal? That has happened. We only have to cast our minds back to the hydro blackout. The fact is that some people, when the community is struggling the most, see that as some opportunity for them to pad their pockets. I know the vast majority of people in this province find that behaviour completely reprehensible, but as a Legislature, are we in a position to say, other than some moral suasion, that it is completely and utterly unacceptable that in a provincial emergency, instead of helping your neighbours, you kick them when they're down, that you decide that perhaps you can make a quick buck? That is exactly what this bill is all about.

Just one small point about the need for us, as a Legislature, as a province, to prepare for the nightmare: We can only pray that we will never have to deal with the nightmare in our own terms of office, but we would be foolish not to be prepared. There is a time for consultation and there is a time for action. I am heartened that all of my colleagues have decided that now is the time to debate, to deal with this and to take action against the darkness.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate. My comments this evening are not going to get into too many specifics related to the legislation. I'm going to leave that to our critic, Mr. Dunlop, when he has an opportunity to participate in the near future. My comments are going to be more general in nature and to some degree based on my own experiences. I think that they are unique, perhaps not something that you necessarily boast about, in the sense that I was the Solicitor General at the time of the ice storm, which many of us will recall, certainly in eastern Ontario, and I was the Minister of Public Safety and Security with the two outbreaks of SARS and with the blackout. So I have had some experience with the responsibilities of dealing with emergencies in the province, and I would like to comment related to that experience and also to some of the concerns I have with respect to the way the government has approached this issue. Hopefully, it will be for the most part constructive criticism and not construed as partisan in nature, unlike what we heard from the minister when he first tabled the legislation.

I wasn't here for his opening comments, but I gather he reiterated some of the allegations that he made when he introduced the legislation, that he was doing so because the committee legislation had been held up by the opposition parties and that we wouldn't allow it to be called for second reading, which is—Mr. Speaker, I have to ensure that I don't incur your wrath here, and I will not do that by saying something that's unparliamentary, but that is simply not accurate. As the House leader for the official opposition, I can tell you—and I think, if you look back in Hansard, this view is shared perhaps in a more colourful way by the House leader for the third party—that we did certainly have discussions around the committee legislation dealing with the emergency issue. Our concerns were really echoing those of Justice Archie Campbell and others on the extensive reach of the legislation and the impacts in terms of personal freedoms etc. that we felt required extensive review. We never suggested that we would, in any way, shape or form, somehow obstruct the legislation coming forward. We don't have the powers as opposition parties to say to the House leader of the government that you can't call a bill for second reading. So to suggest to the public that somehow we wouldn't allow the bill to be called for second reading is truly unfortunate. For the minister to once again say that in the House today, I'm not sure what to say. We saw the political games being played—we

saw it earlier today with respect to the assessment legislation—which is truly unfortunate.

What we did say—and I want to put it on the record. The government kept referencing the possibility of bird flu, and the chief veterinary officer wanted to have some powers to deal with the possibility of a bird flu epidemic. What we suggested to him, given the complexity of this legislation and all of the implications of this legislation, was, why not bring in a single piece of legislation that would address the requirements or the desires of the chief veterinary officer of the province of Ontario? Bring it in, and we can probably agree to pass that very quickly. But to suggest that, in dealing with that one immediate concern, we give carte blanche to this in terms of quick passage would not be appropriate in terms of adequate scrutiny by the opposition and by the public at large in addressing concerns. I'm sure we would hear from Alan Borovoy, and certainly we knew we were going to hear from Justice Archie Campbell, whom I have enormous respect for, having worked with Justice Campbell in the review of the Bernardo investigations and the excellent report and advice he provided to the government with that undertaking. So we simply couldn't ignore that. But if you have an immediate concern, isolate that concern, bring it forward and we will co-operate. I think it was an extremely co-operative offering on the part of both the Progressive Conservative opposition and, I believe, the NDP opposition as well.

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But no. The government again chose to play political games and bring in comprehensive legislation as government legislation and once again try to put pressure on us to move rapidly without taking a look at all of the implications. That's not our role. We have a role to provide that kind of scrutiny and oversight, to ensure that concerns are addressed and that the public has an opportunity to have input. We're going to do the job we're put here to do. That's the bottom line.

In general terms, I want to talk about some history here. I suspect that we, in reviewing this legislation—and we'll hear more from our critic in a few days—by and large will be supportive of most of the content of this legislation.

I had the opportunity to work for six years with Dr. Jim Young. When I became Solicitor General, he was ADM of public safety and chief coroner. When I went back into the ministry in 2002, he was still in that role. I have a great deal of admiration and affection for Jim Young. Certainly he has authored a significant portion of this legislation. How much, I'm not sure, but I know that he and I had a number of conversations about the need for changes to be made so that the province could in the future more adequately respond to emergency situations. There are a couple of things, though, I want to talk about related to emergency situations and security.

I was reading the minister's statement when he introduced the legislation. This is out of Hansard, December 15, and I'm quoting the minister, the Honourable Mr. Kwinter:

"Clearly, times are changing, and we must all get used to a new reality. We've learned that we are all vulnerable. The world has changed, and governments everywhere have been forced to change as well." He cites the terrorist attacks in Madrid, the London bombings, and the attacks on the hotels in Jordan as reminders that terrorists can and will strike anywhere. He talks about "modern weaponry, travel, technology and the interconnected global economy" increasing the risk substantially, and the threats to our safety from a variety of sources. I couldn't agree more, but the irony in that is how the Liberal government has approached these kinds of issues since taking office in 2003.

I was asked to go back into the ministry in 2002 by the new Premier, Mr. Eves. His view at the time, and it's certainly one that I shared, was that in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and the challenges posed by terrorism throughout the world, we should be more proactive in the province of Ontario not just in dealing with ice storms or tornadoes or other kinds of natural disasters, those kinds of issues, but that as the largest province and with the largest city and the capital of Canada in the province of Ontario, we should be taking a more proactive role in terms of preventing terrorist attacks on our province. That was essentially part of the mandate that Premier Eves gave me when he reappointed me to the ministry and gave the ministry a new title, the Ministry of Public Safety and Security. So along with the responsibilities that had gone with the Solicitor General and correctional services ministry in the past, we had this new responsibility for security.

One of the first things I did was retain a security adviser to the minister. We established an Ontario security council, the first of its kind, which was chaired by Dr. Jim Young, who was ADM of public safety and chief coroner of the province. That security council was comprised of Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, perhaps the most respected military officer in our memories as people in this place, the former head of the RCMP—his name escapes me at the moment.

Hon. Mike Colle (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Inkster.

Mr. Runciman: Norman Inkster. We also had the chief medical officer of health as part of that security council, as well as the security adviser to the minister. This was a blue-ribbon panel to review intelligence issues, security issues, within the province; not restricted to counter-terrorism or those kinds of issues, but also our ability to respond to natural disasters like pandemics, bird flu, whatever could strike the province or the country. That was put in place.

We also put additional monies into the ROPE squad, which deals with a lot of people who are in this country illegally. We expanded the mandate of the ROPE squad. These are repeat offenders who have broken parole, but we expanded it to deal with illegal immigration and illegal immigrants at large in the country as well. We also significantly invested in the Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario. We created a new anti-terrorism unit within the OPP and we started to work very closely with the

RCMP, with CISO. This was an arrangement that was working extremely well. You take a look at when the Liberal Party formed the government in the fall of 2003, there was very quickly a very ominous signal issued by them when they changed the name of the ministry. They eliminated "security" from the title of the ministry and instead went back to actually calling it a new name, Community Safety and Correctional Services. Security was eliminated from the equation.

Mr. Hudak: Strange.

Mr. Runciman: Yes, passing strange, and concerning at the time.

Mr. Wilson: Makes you wonder what their priorities are.

Mr. Runciman: Well, then they almost immediately disbanded the Ontario security council, with people like Inkster and MacKenzie, who were essentially volunteering their time to provide solid advice.

Mr. Hudak: Why would they do that?

Mr. Runciman: I don't know why they've done that. I think the minister said publicly that these are responsibilities of the federal government; the province shouldn't be playing a role here. Well, I would strongly disagree with that, especially with the largest city in the country here, the city of Toronto, the subway system, the vulnerabilities that exist in this city; and the capital of the country, Ottawa, and the potential for attacks in that community as well. We should be participating. We should be actively involved.

In the last budget of the Conservative government in 2003, we put an additional \$1 million into the ROPE squad, monies that never flowed, I'm advised—another indication of the lack of interest in anti-terrorism and security issues affecting Ontario.

We also heard stories earlier this year, where the government had decided to gut CISO, dramatically reducing the funding for the Criminal Intelligence Service of Ontario. I'm told just coming in here that because that became public knowledge and concerns were expressed in the media about that, they have backed away from that situation.

My colleague mentioned the North American security perimeter, which is something we strongly advocated for, but were opposed by the federal Liberal government of the day. In fact, I went to Washington to give a speech talking about security issues and the North American security perimeter. We had extreme difficulty with the embassy in Washington, which wanted to edit my speech and remove any references to the North American security perimeter. John Manley was the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time and they were strongly objecting to the Ontario position, as was the Liberal opposition in this Legislature, now the government.

It's passing strange that now Mr. Manley is in the private sector, he is now a strong advocate for a North American security perimeter.

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Mr. Hudak: I think he always was.

Mr. Runciman: I suspect he always was.

I guess that from a Liberal perspective, talking about that kind of co-operation with our friends in the United States is anathema. There's so much entrenched anti-Americanism in the Liberal Party, nationally and provincially, that I guess they can't offend their core by being seen to be supportive of anything that makes common sense with respect to continental security if it involves co-operation with the United States, our best friends and allies in the world. In any event, I thought I should put that on the record as well.

I remember their comments when perhaps I should not have referenced in a scrum that the OPP had indicated there had been a terrorist cell operating in Ontario—at least one. Of course, I was ridiculed by the Liberal opposition for referencing that. The Minister of Health recently described a professional medical organization as terrorists. That's the Liberal perspective on terrorists. He called medical professionals in this province terrorists, and at the same time he and his colleagues were ridiculing me, ridiculing the OPP counter-terrorism unit for indicating that there were terrorist cells operating in Ontario.

I don't know. It's kind of mind-boggling with respect to the way these people address these kinds of issues and then suggest to us that we have to give this legislation quick approval without giving people the opportunity to look at all the implications of some of the individual rights that are going to be removed here and some of the extensive powers that the provincial government of the day will be granted.

I also want to mention Jim Young—I mentioned him earlier—who is now an adviser at the federal level.

Mr. Hudak: We miss him.

Mr. Runciman: We certainly miss him.

He was, I think, the poster boy for public service in the province of Ontario and probably in Canada, probably the most respected public servant to serve the province and the public service of Ontario in the last 30 years—a world-renowned reputation, certainly in the field as a coroner. He has attended many of the most significant disasters we've seen in our time. He was one of the first people there at 9/11; the Swiss Air disaster; he was over to Kazakhstan. He's been all over the world. He went over with the tsunami as well, representing Ontario and Canada—an unbelievable gentleman and so accomplished, one we could all be proud of.

I was proud to work in that ministry with so many fine civil servants, but Dr. Jim Young stood head and shoulders over virtually everyone I've ever worked with in the public service over my 25 years as an MPP. I want to comment on the way he left that ministry, I think under very mysterious circumstances. I certainly don't want to embarrass Jim Young; it's the last thing I would want to do. But I think it is unfortunate that he's no longer in that ministry, and there are very serious questions about why he is no longer in that ministry in my view—the fact that the media speculated that the individual who replaced him, someone whom I like as well, was put into that position because there was some political

threat he might run as a Conservative candidate in the next provincial election.

This is the kind of political mindset that I think operates within the current Liberal government. If indeed that was what happened, it speaks volumes about that government's respect for people like Jim Young who have done such enormously good works for this province, for this country, for so many years.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments?

Ms. Martel: I just want to follow up with something the member from Leeds–Grenville said with respect to timing. He gave a bit of a history of what the government had asked with respect to this bill and why we had said—both opposition parties—that if we wanted to deal with something with the chief veterinarian of Ontario, then we could deal with that legislation, but we shouldn't be trying to rush this other important piece of work through as well under the guise of trying to deal with a specific scenario that had been identified by the chief veterinarian.

I've heard some Liberal members talk about why we need to do this and we need to do this now. I appreciate that. I pointed out to the minister that this should go to committee again, and I agree with him and I'm glad he's agreed to do that.

With those who would continue to say that this is a rush and needs to be done now and we are living in a state where we don't have an emergency plan, I guess I'd have to point out that the reality is that the bill was introduced on December 15, 2005, by Minister Kwinter. The Legislature did sit for three weeks in February and the beginning of March 2006. I guess if it was such a priority and there was such urgency, I'd have to ask why the government didn't move the bill forward then, because we certainly could have dealt with it on second reading at that time, and we could be moving it to committee at this time. So for those who say we need to rush, rush, rush this and it's terrible that we have a state now where we don't have an emergency plan in Ontario, the reality is we could have dealt with this bill in that three-week period when we sat in February 2006, and it wasn't called by the government.

So what I draw from that is that the government doesn't think it's as critical as some of the backbenchers would purport it to be. I think that there is lots of room for improvement and I hope the committee process that follows second reading will be a process where the significant concerns that have been raised, especially by Justice Campbell, will be dealt with then.

Mr. Jim Brownell (Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh): As the clock winds down this afternoon on this debate, I'm delighted to have a few minutes to speak on Bill 56.

As the member from Leeds–Grenville commented about leadership during such events as the ice storm of 1998 in eastern Ontario and the blackout, I too had the opportunity of being in a position of leadership, and certainly it wasn't easy.

I had just been elected as the reeve of the new township of South Stormont after amalgamation, and we were flying basically by the seat of our pants in that regard. We came together as a new township, put together an emergency plan, and I think that we have a very strong plan in that community now.

But as we have the global threats these days, especially with the aftermath of 9/11 and all that we read and hear about today of those threats around the world, I think it's very important that we have a comprehensive strategy for emergency powers. I believe this legislation will bring us up to the standard that we see across Canada with regard to other provinces and their leadership with regard to comprehensive strategies for emergency powers. I think that's a very important component of Bill 56.

As we work through this in committee to bring this to finalization, I think we will be a proud Ontario to have in our hands, in our workings in government, a bill that will give us the tools that we require as we face the emergencies of the future. I'm just pleased to have had this opportunity to provide a few words of encouragement.

Mr. Wilson: I just want to commend my colleague Mr. Runciman, the member for Leeds–Grenville, for his comments on Bill 56. Of course, Mr. Runciman has served his community as safety and corrections minister, Solicitor General, corrections, public safety and public security minister, so he knows of what he speaks. He's highly regarded by police forces, our paramedic officers, our emergency measures services people, by our firefighters. Regardless of whether they're the highly unionized associations that speak with him or the chiefs themselves and management, he has an understanding of all sides. He served as a union official many years ago, I believe in the chemical industry. The fact of the matter is, he's highly regarded. He's done a great job.

During his comments tonight, he did raise the point of why the McGuinty Liberals got rid of the Ontario security council, which had such distinguished citizens as Major-General MacKenzie and Norman Inkster, former head of the RCMP, on it. I think it's strictly politics. I think Mr. Runciman alluded to that during his comments. It's too bad, because those people aren't political. All parties have asked Norman Inkster to look into things. For example, I hired him after he'd retired from the RCMP, when I was health minister, to look into health care fraud. The federal Liberals have asked him to look into different things. Although he did run as a Conservative candidate one time, we've all asked Major-General MacKenzie—almost all political stripes—to investigate things. Yet they kicked these good people off, just for political reasons, and they disbanded the Ontario security council, which was a very important body that

really had just begun to work on many of the problems that have led to Bill 56.

I just want to say a final word about my friend and colleague from Leeds–Grenville. There was no better leadership. I was energy minister during the 1998 ice storm in eastern Ontario, but it was Bob Runciman and Norm Sterling, really, who steered us in the right direction and made sure everyone was pulling on the oars in the right direction. I think, as a government, we came through that particular crisis—which was one of only two that have ever been declared in the province of Ontario, I believe—very well, and it had a lot to do with the leadership of Bob Runciman.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Leeds–Grenville, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Runciman: I appreciate the input of all my colleagues.

I could have spoken on this issue at length, but there's one thing I did want to reference. My colleague from Erie–Lincoln mentioned customs officers being armed. The new federal government is prepared to keep that commitment, and I certainly support that. But one of the things that I raised, and our government supported, back in 1995 relates to gun crime. We hear Mayor Miller talking about increased enforcement. This is passing strange. I appeared before a Senate committee in 1995 as the Solicitor General. I was concerned about the long gun registry being brought in by the federal Liberal government. We projected at the time—and this was not a political projection; it was the officials within the Ministry of the Solicitor General—this was going to cost taxpayers over \$2 billion, and it has proven to be quite accurate. Others were suggesting that this was going to cost that much money and not have any real impact in terms of curtailing gun crime in Canada. One of the suggestions we made, in terms of an investment, to really have an impact on gun crime was using those monies for front-line police officers across the country, but also initiating a border patrol across the country. If we had done that, I think we would have had a real impact on the flow of illegal weapons across the US–Canada border.

Of course, we've had Liberals who have stood up—including Mr. McGuinty and all his colleagues who are now sitting in the government benches—who were very supportive of this wasteful long gun registry, but then they yammer about guns coming across the US–Canada border. When they had an opportunity to support real, effective measures, they refused to do so.

The Deputy Speaker: It being past 6 of the clock, and since Emma and Adam are waiting for Grandpa for dinner, this House is adjourned until 10 of the clock on March 30.

The House adjourned at 1804.

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N° 52

ISSN 1180-2987

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

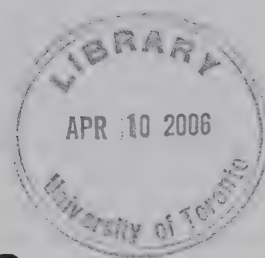
Second Session, 38th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Deuxième session, 38^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**



Thursday 30 March 2006

Jeudi 30 mars 2006

Speaker
Honourable Michael A. Brown

Président
L'honorable Michael A. Brown

Clerk
Claude L. DesRosiers

Greffier
Claude L. DesRosiers

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 30 March 2006

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 30 mars 2006

*The House met at 1000.
Prayers.*

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION MANDATORY DECLARATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 EXIGEANT UNE DÉCLARATION AU SUJET DU DON D'ORGANES ET DE TISSU

Mr. Klees moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 67, An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death / Projet de loi 67, Loi modifiant diverses lois pour exiger que soit faite une déclaration au sujet du don d'organes et de tissu au moment du décès.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Klees, pursuant to standing order 96, you have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'm proud to rise today to discuss an issue that I believe, and am very hopeful, will find common ground in this place. It's not often, I think, that all three parties can see an issue from the perspective of the good that it can do and the lives that it can save. I believe we have before us today a bill that should have the confidence of every member of this House.

Before I go into the details of this bill, I want to recognize individuals in the galleries today who are with us and who are playing a very important role in ensuring that the issue before us is implemented. There are those who have benefited from organ transplant, tissue transplant. I want to first of all recognize Dr. Frank Markel from the Trillium Gift of Life Network, who is here with us today, along with Jennifer Tracey. In that context, I want to recognize my colleague Elizabeth Witmer, who, then the Minister of Health, had the privilege of introducing the legislation that gave life to the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

I also want to recognize today Ms. Janet Bick, the Kidney Foundation's director of government and professional relations; Ms. Riva Grinshpan, president of the central branch of the Kidney Foundation; and Mr. Wayne Sampson, who is a transplant recipient and volunteer for the Kidney Foundation. The Kidney Foundation is here in the Legislature today to give focus to the important work of that foundation and, obviously, to the application

of the very subject that we're speaking to today to individuals in this province.

The origin of this bill is with my constituents. When I introduced this bill initially, I did so in honour of a good friend, Don Cousens, who is a former member of this Legislature and the current mayor of Markham. He himself is a recipient of a kidney transplant and, as we speak today, is again on a waiting list, this time for a double transplant.

I also want to recognize in the gallery today Mr. Geoffrey Risen and his wife, Sandra. Mr. Risen is also a recipient of a kidney; Mr. Glenn Wood as well. These are folks who sat across from me in my constituency office and spoke to me about their challenges, their anxiety, their frustration with a system in this province that, quite frankly, is unconscionable, given the nature of our province, the wealth of our province and the boasting that we do about one of the best health care systems in the world. Yet every three days one person dies on a waiting list awaiting a transplant in this province. It is not because people in this province don't want to be organ donors, because an Environics poll tells us that 96% of people, when asked, support organ donation, yet only 40% or so actually ever sign a donor card. So I suggest to you, Speaker, and I ask members of this Legislature to consider why it is that we are falling far behind many other jurisdictions in the availability of organ donations. I suggest that this bill before us goes in some direction to alleviating that concern.

The bill before us will require, when implemented, that every person 16 years of age and older in the province of Ontario, as a matter of course of making application for or renewing a driver's licence or a provincial health card, make a declaration regarding their intentions concerning organ donation. That declaration will be a standard part of the application form for the driver's licence or the provincial health card.

I want to make it very clear that what this legislation does not do is force anyone to make a decision to be an organ donor, and it doesn't force anyone to say no. In fact, what the application allows for is a yes, a no or an undecided. It should be of no offence to anyone. It's simply a declaration that, "I have given thought to this." I believe it's important that we have a built-in mechanism in those two important provincial documents that actually forces people to confront this very important issue periodically in the course of their life, to give consideration to this life-giving issue.

Every person in this province has the ability to give life and to sustain life. I believe we, as legislators, have

an opportunity here, through this legislation, to make that a possibility and ensure that people don't miss that important opportunity to give life and to sustain life. I believe that it's very important that individuals have the right to make that very personal decision. I do not believe that anyone should be presuming that that is a decision that people make.

I want to, at this point in time, thank my colleague Peter Kormos for his initiative through his private member's bill. I also want to recognize that there are other bills in this place. Mr. Levac has introduced, I believe, a very important bill as well that relates to introducing an education program beginning in the elementary school level to ensure that young people understand the importance and the implications of organ donation, and I would support that.

I'm not suggesting that this legislation before us holds all of the answers, but I do believe it's a very important part of ensuring that we take the important step to ensure that people in our province have the opportunity to have their lives saved, have the quality of their life improved. If we can do that, why not?

I want to recognize as well in the gallery a constituent, Gerri Seely, and her husband Dennis. Gerri is a recipient of a transplant, a living transplant. This is an incredible story of a friend who came forward to offer herself as a donor. I believe that in all of this we have an example that life is a miracle, and we can pass that miracle on to others if we just have an open mind to it.

1010

In the gallery as well is Heather Dunlop. I want to welcome her in a special way, because her husband, just a week ago, I believe, received a lung transplant. Mr. Dunlop wrote me not too long ago, about two weeks before his transplant: "My name is Dave Dunlop. I have been waiting for a lung transplant since January 2004. I am on oxygen 24/7. I attend the hospital four times weekly for physiotherapy." He appeals and he says this: "Please keep us all in mind. These legislative changes are urgent. People are dying on the waiting list. You have the power to help."

I say to my colleagues in the Legislature today that you have the power to help. If there's anything we get elected for, if there is any opportunity we have to improve the quality of life of the people we represent, then this is an opportunity to do that. I appeal to you for your support. I appeal to the government that, should this legislation pass as a private member's bill, we have the support of the government as we move through the committee stage and that the government will see this indeed as a non-partisan issue, that this is not something we should have political debates about, but because it's the right thing to do, they would move quickly to implementation because it is practical, it is doable and it will save lives.

I thank you, Speaker. I thank members of the Legislature. I look forward to hearing from you, I look forward to hearing any advice you may have for improvement to this bill and I ask for your support.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry–Prescott–Russell): I'm delighted to take part in this debate. Organ donation is certainly a serious issue in this province. Close to 2,000 people are waiting for an organ donation in Ontario. While this waiting list has nearly doubled in the past 10 years, the number of volunteer donors has remained virtually the same.

According to the information received from the Trillium Gift of Life Network, every three days a person dies waiting for an organ transplant. In fact, while the majority of Ontarians support the idea of organ donation, less than 45% of those who have already signed their organ donor card got their families to agree to the transplant issue.

This bill does not go far enough to improve the situation for organ transplants in this province. This is why, on March 2, I introduced Bill 79, the Trillium Gift of Life Network Statute Law Amendment Act, 2006. My bill would create an organ donor registry that will be operated by the Trillium Gift of Life Network. This registry will allow Trillium to quickly and easily access organ donor information once an individual has died. My bill proposes that a consent form be distributed with every application for or renewal of a person's health card or driver's licence. Upon the death of a person, the consent is binding and is full authority for the use of the body's organs or tissue unless the person has explicitly withdrawn the consent in writing or has orally withdrawn the consent in the presence of and attested to by two witnesses. A registry containing the consent information will be created and maintained by the Trillium Gift of Life Network.

Encourager les Ontariennes et les Ontariens à déclarer leur consentement à donner leurs organes, et à en discuter avec leur famille, n'est qu'une première étape. Il est impératif que les consentements soient cueillis et qu'un registre soit créé afin que les donneurs potentiels puissent être facilement identifiés. Ce registre faciliterait le processus pour ceux et celles en attente d'organes.

I am pleased to support Bill 67 today because it is a positive step towards educating Ontarians about organ donation. I encourage the members of this Legislature to look beyond party lines and vote in favour of this bill today.

Mr. John Yakabuski (Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke): It's my pleasure to join in here this morning to support my colleague Mr. Frank Klees from Oak Ridges on his private member's bill, Bill 67.

I think that Mr. Klees's bill strikes the right balance. It covers all of the salient points that I think are necessary in this bill. Mr. Klees's bill allows people to make that choice. It allows people to take into consideration all of the things that they might be concerned about. It certainly allows people to take into consideration their personal or religious concerns with regard to organ donation or anything else, because it leaves those options. It's a yes, a no or an undecided. I think Mr. Klees has been very, very thorough in preparing this bill.

I think it's appropriate that today, Kidney Health Day here at Queen's Park, we are debating this bill.

I want to talk a little bit about some personal stuff. When my brother passed away suddenly in 1997, several of his organs, including both his kidneys, were donated, and five or six lives were continued and saved because of his organ donation.

I must say that in my personal situation, the current circumstances that force you to make a decision to say you're going to donate your organs—for many years, while I was a person who believed in the importance of organ donation, I didn't have my card signed. I didn't have that decision down pat. I would hope that if something had happened to me, my family would have made the decision, but that's not a guarantee. Today I have that card signed, but I think the situation that Mr. Klees is working on is much better. It would compel me, at the renewal or issuance of a driver's licence or OHIP card, to make that decision at that time.

I want to say I greatly respect the members for Niagara Centre, Glengarry–Prescott–Russell and Brant for their passion on these causes. I was very pleased to support the member for Brant's private member's bill last year, which is now law, with regard to anaphylactic students and children. I understand the passion that they have, and I do believe that Mr. Klees's bill strikes the right balance and is the optimum choice to make in this particular circumstance.

When I go throughout my riding, I can't count the number of people whose lives have been saved and prolonged by being the recipient of an organ, yet we see the waiting lists. The kidney waiting list, of course, is the longest by far: some 1,346 people on the 2005 waiting list for kidneys in this province, and a total of 1,920 people on a waiting list.

1020

We have to do what we can in our power to alleviate and to shrink that list. I think the choice we make today with regard to the member from Oak Ridge's bill will go a long way to ensuring that the wishes of the 96%, as you've heard, who believe in organ donation will actually be carried out. Through the process of elimination, if you want to call it that, they will not have to make that conscious choice. They will be making the choice when they renew those licences or when people over the age of 16 get licences; they will make that decision then and there. And it does leave the option. Anyone who believes that for their personal reasons they cannot support organ donation has that option, but for the rest of us who do believe in organ donation and have not made that choice, this will come compel us to make a choice. If we're unsure at that time, we can make that choice and fill in the undecided portion of that card.

As I say, it covers the bases, it strikes the balance, and I think it gives us and our families every opportunity to ensure that our wishes have been carried out in the event that we are in a position to donate our organs to save someone's else's life. I just can't believe there's a greater gift we can offer to the rest of mankind.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): My opportunity today is to tell something to Mr. Klees that I made a commitment to do, and I'm going to do that right now. I think it's a good bill. I'm going to be supporting the bill, and I think it's taking us in the right direction in the province of Ontario. That said, I want to make some other points.

The first one is that I do have my organ donor card. I would suggest every single person in the province take a look for this card, and if it's not in your wallet, find a way to put it in there. Sign it and have the discussion with your family to ensure that those organs get where they belong.

Number two, there's another little sticker that you can put on other cards that acknowledges that the organ donor card is signed. That's another indication to those people in the hospitals who know what's going on. That's the second thing I want to bring up and make sure that everybody understands.

We want to talk about the bill. What has it done? It has done one thing that I think all the bills that are presented before us do to take the momentum and move forward, and that is to spark the debate. We've had that debate, we're having that debate and we're going to continue to have the debate to find a way in which all of us can make sure the gift of life is provided.

Right now there are four bills, but we've had bills since 1999 that I'm aware of, since I've been here. I want to make sure that everyone is aware of those, so let's go through them: Bill 17, a private member's bill, May 5, 2003, by Mr. Gilchrist; Bill 156, December 2, 2004, by Mr. Kormos; Bill 33, mine, November 21, 2005—I'll review that for two seconds; Bill 61, February 16, 2006, by Mr. Kormos; Bill 79, March 2, 2006, by Mr. Lalonde. There seems to be a theme here. People understand that there's something going on about organ donation, but guess what? None of these bills has been passed. It's time for us to start passing some bills to make sure that we tighten, improve and correct laws.

Another thing has happened recently that I'm very happy about—and I report to the House that we have continued to move forward—is that the Minister of Health enabled a section of the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act which notifies the network of the 16 A hospitals that have been identified so that, upon death, the Trillium Gift of Life Network is notified that that death has taken place. It has tripled donations. So there are steps being taken even now. But you know what? It's not good enough. I agree with the member opposite; I agree with Mr. Klees that we need to do more.

In my own riding, I support on a regular basis—and I know our community does. Some private enterprise, along with public institutions, get together to do curling bonspiels for the Gift of Life. That's supported across our riding, and I know it's supported across the province. Those are other things that are happening. Not only are we getting those recipients—and we celebrate them at lunchtime. We celebrate them to say how many years it has been since they've had their organ donations. We've had some people with amazing anniversaries, and quite

frankly, those anniversaries would not have been celebrated without organ donation. Sadly, I have to present this piece of information that makes us act even more: Every three days someone dies waiting for an organ—every three days. So three days from now, know this: Someone is going to die waiting for an organ.

Science has moved us further and further into the realm of unbelievable reality. Almost every single organ is now able to be transplanted. Multiple organs are being transplanted, and we're extending our lives. That is truly remarkable. That, to me, is why we should be moving forward.

Getting back to Bill 33 for just a moment, as I do support the bill, I think we need to change the culture. How do we change the culture of organ donation? I don't believe, personally, that we radically force that cultural change down somebody's throat. What I honestly believe in is the example that MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, gave us. A bunch of mothers got together and said, "Enough is enough with drinking and driving." So they formed an organization, a group that put in front of the decision-makers the horrible face of drinking and driving. Before MADD came along, people did those horrendous things, drinking—they couldn't even walk. They got into a car and drove and killed somebody, and they weren't getting convicted by the juries because that was them on Saturday night. But Mothers Against Drunk Driving said, "Enough of this." We've changed the culture. Talk to anyone out there who says that drinking and driving is okay now. We changed a culture of behaviour.

Seat belts: a 97% use rate. There was a furor about forcing people to wear seat belts. Now, it's a culture change.

I believe this is what we need to do here. Bill 33 basically says that in the school system across the province of Ontario we must have an educational program that makes it clear what organ donation is about before the 16th birthday comes when you sign that card. I fully believe in this bill. I fully believe that the dialogue needs to continue, but we need to take action. I want to tell the member that I will be supporting his bill. I will be working alongside him and the others who have bills of the same nature to improve and to change the culture, because it's a disgrace that Ontario has the record it has for organ donation. It's time to act. I will be supporting the bill, and I encourage each and every one of us to support the type of legislation we see before us today. Get that organ donor card signed and the tickets on the other cards for notification, and speak to your family about that organ donation that you so desperately give, because the people are wanting to us do this.

Thank you to the Kidney Foundation, and thank you to the Trillium Gift of Life Network and to all of the other organizations that are giving the gift of life.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): I'm pleased to participate. I've been looking forward to this opportunity. I'm going to make it very clear right off the bat that New Democrats support this legislation, support the Klees bill,

and indeed expect that it's going to go to committee, not for some phoney one-day hearing so that it can be sloughed off and thrown out into legislative orbit, into that big black hole, that repository of so many private members' bills, and even more than a few flawed government bills, but for a meaningful committee process so that the bill has a good chance of—because what happens, folks, is that once today is over, the bill is no longer the property, regrettably, of the private member. It becomes the property of the government. The government controls when it's called for third reading. I anticipate that this bill will pass today, so I say to you folks, don't bug Mr. Klees from today forward; put the pressure on Mr. McGuinty, because it's him and his office that are going to decide that this bill gets called for third reading.

The Klees proposal is what's referred to as the mandated choice model and it's one that's recognized as being capable of improving and enhancing the number of organs available. We've got such a short amount of time for private members' public business. I've got to tell folks, because I've had no personal experience with organ transplants—nobody in my family, none of my friends, nobody who has been close to me. But I've got to tell you again, it's something that, all of my adult life, I've been thinking, "Well, of course you use organs after somebody is dead." But I've got to tell you, it was George Marcello—all of you will remember this—and young Kristopher's Wish campaign that provoked my interest in, yes, my friends, radical approaches to increasing the number of organs available for transplant. I want to thank him and I want to acknowledge his tremendous work. George Marcello, as a lay advocate, is as passionate and as effective an advocate as we have seen in this province and in this country for organ donation and organ donation reform. Young Kristopher was and is a delightful and courageous young man.

1030

I also want to indicate that none of us sit down at our personal computers at night—I almost said "typewriters," Mr. Levac—and write these bills; we rely upon legislative counsel. We also rely upon legislative research and library research. I have got to tell you, there's a pile of material available there: debates amongst ethicists, debates within the medical community, statisticians, legal debates around this matter, focused not just in Canada and the United States but of course internationally, because of the radical reforms that have taken place in Europe. So I want to thank the Legislative Assembly staff who helped me acquire this huge package of material: Lorraine Luski, who is the research officer, assisted by June Pae, research librarian, and by Andrew Reid, legislative learner.

Mr. Klees and I did one of those talking head shows the other day down at CTS; *On The Line*, a good show, quite frankly, a very good topical, lively debate around public affairs issues. Of course, every time he and I—either individually or, more often than not recently, together—do one of those or a radio show, we get the e-mails.

I got a delightful e-mail from a woman I'm just going to call Yvette, who complimented all of us on this debate, on provoking thought around the issue. She didn't appreciate my—see, I talk about organ donation as basically a waste diversion system. I'm sorry to be crude, but when you're dead, you have no use for the liver, the kidneys, the heart, the lungs—no use whatsoever. All they are is dead weight for the pallbearers; all they do is get in the way of the embalmer. We have gone to great lengths to discourage people from taking recyclable bottles to landfill sites. What a crime, in terms of scarce landfill sites. It's similarly a crime, in my view, to bury or burn good organs that the owner no longer has any use for. The owner isn't even there. Yvette, in her e-mail, said that she wished I wouldn't refer to organs as being selfish.

I don't know. I came from down in Niagara region. I remember when I was 16 years old, my first vehicle was a 1946 Chev pickup; I bought it for \$85. I went to O'Bireck's every day for—we called them quarts then—recycled oil, because it used more oil than gasoline. Where I come from, when you needed a new alternator or a new starter motor, you went to O'Bireck's scrapyard and salvaged a used one. The vehicle was dead, rusted out and the motor was gone, but the alternator, the starter motor, was perfectly usable.

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): And the generator, too.

Mr. Kormos: Look, Mr. Ruprecht, if you want to join me, we'll go to the tattoo parlour, line up the belly and write, "Upon death, cut here. Take what you need." I have no qualms whatsoever. The liver may have some bad spots that are going to need cutting out, but maybe one or the other of the kidneys can be used.

I apologize to Yvette for being perhaps somewhat coarse about these things, but I also remark on what Yvette had to say. Again, I'm not critical of her. This is so typical of so many people I've heard from. She said that, "Donating organs and tissue is a selfless act." I understand what she is saying, and so many others have said it, but I profoundly disagree. You see, a live donor of a kidney, that's a selfless act. I just bought one of those \$100 CNIB lottery tickets. That wasn't a selfless act. I was looking at the picture of the Porsche Boxster that I was capable of winning. Giving somebody \$100 without expecting anything back, that's the selfless act. You see, it doesn't cost anything to be an organ donor. It costs you nothing. They open you up and then they sew you up, neat as a bow, and nobody knows it's gone. It's true.

I know there are folks watching this who are going to be e-mailing my office saying, "How dare you talk about organs that way?" And I say this: How dare we let 2,000 people a year languish on waiting lists in Ontario alone when good organs are being buried and burned on a daily basis? Mr. Klees will remember that one of the callers to this phone-in show said I was trying to bully people into giving up their organs after their death, and I admitted readily, "You bet your boots." When we've got 1,800 to 2,000 people a year languishing—some of them kids. We

met some of them two weeks ago, over at Sick Kids Hospital, during Smitherman's press conference. When you see these kids flirting with death on a daily basis, desperately waiting for that pager to buzz, and good organs are being buried and burned, I say, hell's bells, you bet your boots I'm trying to bully people into giving up their organs when they no longer have any use for them.

There's a wealth of information available. The mandated-choice model has not been successful in some jurisdictions. One of the examples in the research material is the state of Texas. But I insist that that has as much to do with the cultural attitude and the values of that community, that it has more to do with that than does the mandated-choice proposal. That's why, while we have to adopt the mandated-choice proposal of Mr. Klees—look, I'm old enough to remember the first heart transplant and so are most of the people in this chamber. The recipient didn't live that long, but it was still considered—it was a miracle. In those days, not that long ago, well within the lifetime of anybody in this chamber who was born in at least the 1950s, in that period, at the very beginning of this phenomenon, donating an organ was an exceptional thing because receiving one was an exceptional thing. Since then, however, organ transplant technology has become as mundane in many cases as appendectomies and tonsillectomies. It's simply a matter of supply.

I say, why should we then consider the donation of the organ to be the exceptional thing? I say the denial of the organ should be the exceptional thing. Only half-jokingly, in response to Mr. Klees's proposal around using the driver's licence renewal—because you do that publicly, right? You line up. As a matter of fact, one of the Texas observations is that people are cranky when they're lined up for their driver's licence renewal. Maybe that's not the best possible time in the world to make them check off on a mandated choice, but that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done.

1040

You know what? The person who checks "no" should feel as self-conscious as the guy who's caught in the adult section of Blockbuster video by his neighbour. There should be red lights flashing, sirens, bells ringing. Somebody should announce, "At aisle 3 there is an Ontarian who just said no to somebody getting his or her organs when he or she dies and has no use for them whatsoever." I believe we should stigmatize the denial of the provision of an organ.

What is this sense of, "It's my right to decide whether or not my organ is used by somebody—my right"? It's your right to decide whether or not somebody lives or dies because you want to bury or burn something that's of no use to you whatsoever, that has no value whatsoever, that in no way adds to the dignity of your funeral process, of the burial? I fundamentally disagree.

I believe it's imperative. If people are offended and shocked—well, I'll let you in on something: It won't be the first time I've offended or shocked people—so be it. I

think we've got to talk radically about this stuff. We've got to support the Klees bill. The government's got to make it law, because the mandated-choice model adds to the status quo. It certainly does. But if we're going to make more than dents in the waiting lists of people who desperately need organs, we've got to fundamentally change the culture around organ donation.

Donation implies everything that it implies. It implies that you're making a sacrifice of something. You donate money. You donate time. You donate furniture. A donation implies that you're sacrificing something for the betterment of somebody else. Letting somebody use or salvage an organ that is merely the content of a cadaver—because that person is no longer there; their soul has gone off to whatever his or her heaven happens to be—to somehow suggest that there should be post-death control over a liver or a kidney to the point of denying it, I say is morally wrong and does not reflect the kinds of values and value system that we ought to be embracing, encouraging and promoting in Ontario and Canada.

Thanks, folks, for letting me participate in this debate.

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to join in this debate and to speak to the bill by my colleague and friend from Oak Ridges. We've had the opportunity to get to know one another, and very often, while we can occasionally tease the other about being ideologically misguided, neither of us, I'm sure, questions the other's commitment to Ontario nor his sincerity in representing his constituents. In this case, I should say at the very start that I intend to vote for this bill. I certainly support the cause advocated by the member from Oak Ridges.

Very much like the member from Niagara Centre, who himself has a bill on much the same subject before this Legislature, I'd like to discuss some of the implications of this and perhaps the member from Niagara Centre's bill and another to be debated from the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell.

There are some issues with this bill that deserve some discussion. Referring to Bill 67 from the member from Oak Ridges, the forced choice at the time one registers for a health card or a driver's licence does create an artificial environment for perhaps an unwarranted number of “no” or “undecided” responses. This may not be what the member intends, but it may indeed be the outcome. Perhaps the person hasn't had time to fully consider the implication of organ donation or time to fully reconcile the decision with his or her upbringing at home or with what they've learned at work or, in fact, with what peer pressure from friends or family may impose upon the person. This should be a personal, and it should be an informed, choice. As the member from Niagara Centre has said, with his tongue in cheek but very powerfully, it should be a choice in favour of organ donation. We'd like to create the climate for all Ontarians to voluntarily make that choice.

Staff in the Ministry of Transportation offices or staff who handle health card registration may perhaps not be

the best people to get involved in a discussion about the personal, legal, moral or ethical implications of organ donation. As the member for Niagara Centre has said, this may not be the kind of discussion you want from the person ahead of you while you've been standing in line to renew your driver's licence and waited for the last hour while this person says, “I'm here to renew my driver's licence; I'm not here to discuss organ donation.” Again, it's not a criticism of the intent of the bill, with which I think every member here agrees; merely of an unintended impact of requiring this choice at the time that you renew your driver's licence.

We ask, for example, what the implications would be under the Canada Health Act if a person was denied a health card or, similarly, a driver's licence, for refusing to make a declaration, as the member from Oak Ridges would require in Bill 67. The member himself was once the Minister of Transportation and highways, and he knows that organ donation is not part of the mandate of the Ministry of Transportation and highways, and especially not the contentious issue of the personal, ethical or religious implications of organ donation made at the time that one tries to renew a driver's licence. So it's questionable, as well, requiring someone who may be new to Canada and whose first language is neither English nor French to make that choice, perhaps without a great deal of advance notice and perhaps without the ability to consult, to discuss or to reconcile it with the donor's personal beliefs. It may require a little bit of study.

To that end, while I am supporting Bill 67, I'm urging the member to send his bill to the same committee that the other two private bills are referred to, so that one comprehensive set of public hearings in one committee can be held to discuss this one very important issue to Ontarians and, in so doing, can come up with a proposal from whichever committee that is that will help this government come up with a piece of legislation that can start saving lives in Ontario and that can educate Ontarians in what a great gift of life a donated organ can be.

I thank you for the time to speak to the bill.

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I want, in the short time I have available, to make it clear that I fully support this bill. I'm very pleased the member from Oak Ridges has brought it forward.

I also think it's important to know that the medical community supports this bill, so I wanted to read into the record parts of three letters that indicate that support. They're addressed to Mr. Klees. The first is from the London Health Sciences Centre. It states, “I fully support your bill that would require individuals getting health cards or driver's licences to declare their wish to donate organs at the time of death. If this bill is passed, and if the vast majority of Ontarians declare that they wish to donate, that will be a major step forward in raising the organ donation rate in this province. Lives will be saved as a result....”

“I also view it as being complementary to the educational bill (Bill 33) that is currently being put forward by David Levac. He wishes to have a course on organ

donation implemented in all of Ontario's secondary schools. A well-educated public will recognize the need for donation and respond positively to the bill proposed by you."

That's from William Wall, MD, director, multi-organ transplant program, London Health Sciences Centre.

From the Ontario Medical Association—just one paragraph in the time I have available: "The OMA advocates for a strong health policy supported by all provincial parties. We believe such a bill would go a long way to improving and saving the lives of so many that need organ and tissue donations in Ontario." That's signed by Greg Flynn, president of the Ontario Medical Association.

From Jeff Zaltzman, director, renal transplant, St. Michael's Hospital:

"Dear Mr. Klees:

"I want to congratulate you on your vision and determination in the introduction of mandated choice legislation for the people of Ontario. As director of the transplant program at St. Michael's Hospital, I deal in a daily basis with those who face waiting times of seven to 11 years for a kidney transplant....

"While mandated choice has been put forward by others before I believe that this is a great opportunity to educate the public, allow donor decisions to be registered and increase the organ donation rate.

"The ability to provide education in advance and mandate a choice of yes, no or undecided is key to the success of the program."

I wanted to get that on the record. I believe this bill makes a lot of sense. It can save lives and make a real difference here in Ontario. I would hope that it is non-partisan and supported by all parties and that the government actually uses their power and brings this logical idea into effect.

1050

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to lend support to my colleague from Oak Ridges, Frank Klees, for a very worthwhile bill. He has explained the background of how the bill came about and has worked closely with all the groups. I appreciate the Kidney Foundation group being here today, it being Kidney Health Day here.

There have been many bills that have been introduced about organ donations in the past. I want to commend the member in front of me here, Elizabeth Witmer, who was Minister of Health in 2000, who brought in the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act. There have been several private members' bills, as we know, since then.

Ontario has certainly been the world leader in successful transplants, with the world's first heart valves being transplanted in Toronto in 1956. I had the opportunity of nursing at Toronto General. I nursed on the cardiovascular, where we used organ donations for some of the heart valves, and then went down to surgical intensive care, where I saw heart transplants, lung transplants and kidney transplants. Thinking back, it's been 16 years since I worked in nursing in the transplant field, and

changes have increased very positively. There are more transplants being done, but there is still that void, with only 40% of people signing their driver's licence cards. People aren't thinking enough about it. The member from Oak Ridges has seen that void and has introduced this bill, which sounds like it's getting support from all sides of the House. We need to encourage people to sign their donor cards and discuss organ donation with their families. The demand for organs is certainly outstripping the growth in donors.

Science, as I said, has come a long way in the 16 years since I worked with transplants. I remember receiving a friend, when I worked in surgical intensive care at Toronto General, who ended up being an organ donor, and watching the family. If they discussed among themselves, in the family, what happens if certain circumstances occur, I think all the family members would feel better. By being able to sign a card and having a discussion with the family, I think that's a lot less pressure on the families. I don't even need to say it's a very difficult and strenuous time when incidents occur and donation questions are asked.

I think, overall, this is going to improve donations and improve the awareness of why we need to donate and why transplants need to occur more. When you say they improve the quality of life, it's interesting to read the statistics. These are the success rates in Canada at one year after transplantation: kidney at 82% to 92%, depending on how closely related the donor is; heart at 83%; liver transplants at 77%; single-lung at 58%; double-lung at 72%; and heart-lung combination is at 72%. Those are just amazing statistics of success that I think we need to promote out there.

There's been a lot of discussion. I know Mr. Kormos has brought in legislation too, but this private member's bill gives the choice. It's the yes, the no or undecided. I think people have to have the right to choose. If it just gets them thinking about it, more people, in this day and age, with the promotion of the success rates, are going to say, "Yes. We want to make a difference in someone else's life if something tragic happens to us."

In the past few days, the Toronto Sun has been running feature stories focusing on organ and tissue donation. They introduce you to individuals: Jo-Ann Robinson, a single mother in Mississauga who is awaiting a kidney transplant and is worried that she will not live long enough to receive a kidney. Jo-Ann says, "The chances of me getting a kidney on the list is extremely slim, as the waiting list is close to 10 years." It's just unbelievable that the waiting list for kidneys can be 10 years. A few days later we learned about Ron Giles, an auto worker who donated his bone marrow to a stranger in 2003. Last year, Ron got to meet the young man who received his life-saving gift. Since then, he has been working to encourage people to join the bone marrow registry.

I know that in the Cavan area of my own riding of Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, there's a young man who is 14, and from somewhere else in Ontario—I believe it's

southwestern Ontario—he got a bone marrow donor, so that he could have a chance of fighting his illness. We’ve all been following his case and fundraising. That’s the type of example of a person not related to the family who saw the need and donated his bone marrow.

I want to compliment the member from Oak Ridges on the fine job he has done in the preparation and introduction of the bill, a much-needed bill, and I encourage everyone in the legislature to support this bill today.

Mrs. Elizabeth Witmer (Kitchener-Waterloo): I want to congratulate my colleague Frank Klees, the member for Oak Ridges, for bringing forward this bill, Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006. As you have heard, it was our government that first introduced legislation, the Trillium Gift of Life Network Act, which regulates the donation of organs and tissues in the province of Ontario. However, we know there are over 1,900 people in this province who are waiting for organ donations. We know that many hundreds die waiting.

Certainly the time has come when we need to raise public awareness of organ donation, the benefits we can give to others in order that they can live healthy lives. This bill, I can tell you, is very strongly supported by the constituents in my riding, who have indicated their support. It gives everybody the opportunity, each and every time they renew their driver’s licence, to thoughtfully consider and raise their awareness, and they can make a choice. I think that is important, that individuals have the opportunity to personally make that decision. So this is important. I know that my own daughter, when she got her driver’s licence, made the decision. I think that with Mr. Levac’s bill, which will introduce a course into our schools, we have the opportunity, certainly in the future, as result of the initiative undertaken by Mr. Klees, to see many more people make the decision, and I congratulate him.

The Deputy Speaker: Mr. Klees, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Klees: I want to thank my colleagues in the House for their encouragement, and I also want to thank the many constituents who led me to this place to bring this bill forward. I want to recognize, among those, Sue Good from Aurora who is here with us today; also Mr. Mark Gregory who is in the gallery—he’s a Toronto resident and someone who is on the waiting list; we wish you well—as well, Mr. Jeremy Beaty who is a transplant recipient who is here; and Mr. George Marcello, who is in the gallery as well, for all his activism and good work on this important issue.

We have before us, I heard from members, some of the potential complications in terms of implementation. There are always issues that have to be worked out, and that is why I look forward to this bill going to committee. I believe this is such a practical piece of legislation. As a former Minister of Transportation, as my colleague said, I’m well aware that the Ministry of Transportation has nothing to do with organ transplants. I’m also aware that everyone in Ontario who drives a car has to fill in an

application to do so. What a tremendous opportunity for us to bring these people face-to-face with this important issue of organ donation. So it is doable.

I will be imploring the government to support this. It appears from the speeches we’ve heard that when the vote is put—I will be asking for a recorded vote on this so that people can see where everyone stands. I look forward to the implementation of this bill.

1100

SWIMMING POOL SAFETY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006

SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES PISCINES

Mr. Rinaldi moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools / Projet de loi 74, Loi traitant de la sécurité autour des piscines.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Pursuant to standing order 96, Mr. Rinaldi, you have up to 10 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It gives me great pleasure to debate second reading of Bill 74. Before I get into that, though, I must tell you that it’s a real honour to sit in this place and be able to do something your community asks. I’m going to guess that probably a year ago I had a call in one of my offices from a constituent. Truly, I’m not even sure this constituent is in my riding. But I felt so interested in what she wanted to talk to me about that riding boundaries really don’t matter when it comes to helping Ontarians. She came to my office. She wanted to talk about protection around swimming pools or, better still, the lack of protection around swimming pools. We had a good discussion. It certainly got my attention. It’s something we take for granted many times. In today’s society, we see swimming pools go in backyards more frequently. So we started working on the process that led us here today to debate this.

I want to thank Mrs. Kelly Shields, her husband, William, and their daughter, Kaitlyn, who are here with us in the east gallery. They believe in this so strongly that they made the trip from Frankford in the city of Quinte West to be here today to lend me some support on what Mrs. Shields initiated over a year ago.

I refer to things best as personal experiences. Some 30 years ago—I know that shows my age a little bit—when we lived in Pickering with four little kids, we had a swimming pool in the backyard. It was fenced off, but we had some neighbours’ kids who knew how to get in through the fence, who participated, along with my kids, when my wife was out there watching them. One day after I came home from work, my wife came to me and said, “I should be going to work.” I said, “Why is that?” She said, “It’s a full-time job trying to keep an eye on the backyard for kids. We don’t want to deprive them of swimming, but somebody has to look after them because you just can’t leave them back there on their own.” So it

becomes a burden; it becomes a responsibility. Of course, it's all to do with keeping these kids safe.

I am bringing this bill forward today. I'm hoping that all members from all sides of the House will support this through the process. I'm certainly prepared to listen to recommendations. I know there are some concerns, especially in rural Ontario, with ponds that some farmers use and those types of things. But I'm sure that once the wheels get in motion, we should be able to address some of those concerns.

Just to give you some sense of the magnitude of the lack of protection around swimming pools, I'm going to read some information for the record. According to data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death among Ontario children under the age of five. In 2002-03, for every child who drowned in Ontario, there were six to 10 more who almost drowned and required hospitalization; 42 children in total were involved in drowning or near-drowning swimming pool accidents in our province during that year.

The organization Safe Kids Canada, which is the national injury prevention program of the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children, shares those concerns. These folks contacted me to congratulate me on this legislation. They've also recognized that it's a lack of protection that we need to address.

From June to August, at least one child will drown every two weeks in Canada, and each day there will be a near-drowning incident. More than half of all drownings or near-drownings happen to children under five. They are at risk because they're attracted to water but don't understand the dangers. Toddlers and preschoolers can drown quickly and silently. These tragedies often happen during a brief lapse of adult supervision. You know what it's like. I think we've all done it. We're just going to sneak away for a few seconds.

Pool fencing offers a proven method to reduce the incidence of children drowning. Safe Kids Canada recommends four-sided fencing around backyards with self-latching gates, accompanied by bylaws and provincial legislation.

Some facts that come from Safe Kids Canada—and this is a group that's really committed to the safety of children—32 children will drown this summer alone, 52 deaths in a full year; 83 will be hospitalized for near drownings. There were 145 hospital admissions in a full year that dealt with either drowning or near drowning. For every child that drowns, there will be three hospitalizations for near-drownings. Children who survive a near-drowning frequently have long-term effects from brain injury due to the period of time without breathing. Drowning at public pools and lifeguarded beaches is rare in Canada. That just proves that the more protection we introduce, the less the risk.

Drowning is the second leading cause of death for kids under five, and that's just behind motor vehicle crashes, so you can see the importance. More than half of drowning deaths and non-fatal drownings happen to children under five—approximately 16 deaths and 42 hospital ad-

missions each summer. Thirty-three per cent of toddler drownings happen in backyard pools. Most toddler drownings occur when the child is walking or playing near water, not swimming or intending to swim, just by mere accident.

Some people will lead you to believe that possibly this type of legislation will create some hardships for some municipalities that already have bylaws to prevent access to swimming pools, but this legislation, if passed, will only complement the bylaws that those municipalities have in place already. We're really asking municipalities that don't have that type of bylaw in place to look to the examples of municipalities that have already done a lot of work. There are a lot of municipalities and cities—London, Ottawa and many more across the province of Ontario—that have taken a leading role.

The Canadian Institute of Health Information released a statement in July 2005—that's just this past summer—noting that seven people per day visit Ontario emergency departments with water-related injuries in the summer months and that children under the age of five are involved in more drowning and near-drowning incidents than those in any other age group, at a rate of 5.24% for every 100,000 population—more than four times the rate for those over the age of 19. The second most-at-risk age group is that of children aged five to nine. As you can see, younger kids are at more risk. They're the ones we need to try to provide some extra protection.

1110

Overall, more than 1,000 people—to be specific, 1,166—visited an Ontario emergency department in 2002-03 because of injuries sustained in a water-related accident, and 68% of those were from drownings or near drownings.

In the very short time that I've had the opportunity to bring some light to the subject in this House, you can see how important this is. I'm not suggesting that my bill, if passed, would cure all those deficiencies that I've talked about, but how can we ignore any potential to alleviate some of these circumstances? I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say from all sides of the House, and if they can help me improve this and get it through this House, I will certainly appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I'm happy to rise and speak to the bill, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools. I think it's a motherhood issue. I don't think anyone would be opposed to providing more safety and more security around swimming pools to protect our young people.

I have here a little pamphlet that gets passed out every time someone in Oxford county gets a permit to build a swimming pool. First of all, there are some facts they put in here—and this was printed in 1998:

“—13 toddlers, (1-4), drowned in home swimming pools in Canada. Seven of these were in Ontario.

“—34% of all toddler drownings occurred in home pools.

“—34% were in-ground pools, 38% above-ground pools and 31% unspecified.

“—75% of the children who drowned in home pools were alone at the time of the incident.

“—19% were under supervision of a minor.

“—6% were with an adult.

“All toddler home pool drownings in 1996, 1997 and 1998 were in pools without self-latching gates.”

I think “without self-latching gates” is rather important because the present legislation before us does not include the self-latching definition of the lock on a gate. I think it’s very critical that that be put in place.

In the same pamphlet, they also provide steps to prevent a tragedy before it occurs. I think that’s so important, and we’ll get back to that when we get back to the legislation. “Install a fence completely around the pool. Check with your local municipality”—I think that’s important, because this is a municipal jurisdiction under the Municipal Act—“for pool-fencing standards.” Again, that’s important because in my opinion this bill does not have any standards. It just says it must be a fence, and I have some problems with that.

“Maintain the gate to ensure that it closes and latches easily and spontaneously.

“Place latch release three inches below the top of the gate, on the side facing the pool. To prevent a child from reaching between the gate and the barrier the gap should be no larger than half an inch.

“If the house forms one side of the barrier around the pool, then doors leading from the house to the pool should have alarms, which produce a loud sound when the door is unexpectedly opened.

“For above-ground pools, steps and ladders should be secured and locked, or removed when the pool is not in use.”

The reason I bring this up—as I said, it’s kind of hard not to speak in favour of anything that will improve the safety of our pools or the safety of our backyards, particularly for our children, but I think it’s also very important to make sure that we don’t present false security for the parents, who now think we have a provincial law that says, “All pools must be fenced,” and now all yards will be equally safe.

I have some comparisons here and I’ll just go through them very quickly. The only thing this bill does—and I stand to be corrected, but in my estimation, as I look through it—is, “The owner of the swimming pool shall ensure that the fence surrounding the swimming pool is constructed and maintained in a manner”—and I don’t know what the manner is—“that is sufficient to keep children away from the area immediately around the pool and is equipped with a gate that locks.” Then of course, it realizes further down that in fact it is a municipal jurisdiction and that a lot of municipalities already have it. I would suggest that what we should be doing is making sure that all municipalities have their municipal bylaw, as opposed to having one that’s different for some in the province than it is for others.

Using that paragraph, I also don’t know how you would have any municipal bylaw that would not be at least as strict as that. We have to remember that this

bylaw only applies to swimming pools, and this is in the definition: “‘swimming pool’ means an in-ground swimming pool.” If you look at the statistics I read when I started, 38% of the drownings of toddlers occurs in pools that are not in-ground pools. They are not covered by this bylaw. In areas where they are dependent on this law, a provincial law, we would immediately assume that this provincial law is more stringent than the municipal bylaw. We’re going to find that they’re not covered in anything except for in-ground pools.

The other part that gives me some problem is, “Every person who contravenes or fails to comply with section 2”—which is that fencing of the pool—“is guilty of an offence and on conviction is liable to a fine of not more than \$500.” I see nothing in this bill about when this is going to happen. As I interpret the bill, this is going to happen when there has been a drowning. Under the municipal bylaw, we have the municipal bylaw enforcement officer who goes around and checks the swimming pools in the area, in the municipality for which they are responsible, to make sure they’re all fenced. This law will have no enforcement. I don’t envision the Ontario Provincial Police going into people’s backyards to see if they have a fence around their pool. So this implies that when we have a problem, that someone didn’t do it, we will fine them \$500, but this law does not make anyone do it, because in fact we have put nothing in place to even notify the people who are going to build a swimming pool that the fence is required.

Again, I think if we’re going to have some provincial connection to it, we should include it in the building code. Every person constructing a swimming pool in Ontario has to apply for a building permit. If it said in the building code that you have to apply for the permit, then the building official will tell you the fence that you have to build or what fence is required or not required, and then it would be enforced by the municipal bylaw enforcement officer. I think that would deal with having equality across the province, and we would be trying to solve the problem before the accident occurred.

With that, I think it’s a good bylaw. Yesterday, as I was looking at the schedule and realizing I had the opportunity to speak to this, I did get a number of bylaws that presently apply. I was somewhat surprised to see this legislation before us, because, having remembered my days as a municipal politician—I became a municipal politician in 1980, and at that time there was a fencing bylaw for our swimming pools in place in our municipality, and there’s been one there ever since. So I took the opportunity to get a copy of it for the debate this morning from the municipal clerk.

This bylaw was put in place on April 6, 1976, so this isn’t something that they’ve just done. I presume that, although I live in a very progressive municipality, a lot of people had one before this, and I expect there have been a lot of other ones, including some of the other ones that I have here that have been implemented since that time. There are a couple of things that I think are very important when you look at the difference between the law

that we're debating here this morning and the municipal bylaws. They're reasonably consistent as we go through all the different ones that are there.

We'll start with the definition. As I said in the law before us today, the definition is any "in-ground swimming pool." A definition of "swimming pool" in the township of South-West Oxford bylaws is "privately owned outdoor swimming pool means any body of water located or to be located outdoors on privately owned property, contained by artificial means and of a depth at any point in excess of one (1) foot, which is intended or used for the purpose of swimming, diving or bathing." Again, putting that in this law would in fact make it all swimming pools in backyards.

Instead of saying that it must be fenced in satisfactorily, to keep people out, and not being able to identify whether that is satisfactory until somebody has gotten in, and then the answer is, "No, it wasn't," the enclosure is defined as, "The owner of a privately owned outdoor swimming pool shall erect and maintain an adequate enclosure surrounding the entire swimming pool area and sufficient to make such body of water not readily accessible to small children."

And "... notwithstanding, where a privately owned outdoor swimming pool is above ground, four (4) or more feet in height, and entrance to the pool is by a ladder or steps, only the ladder or steps must be enclosed." Again, you can just fence the steps going in.

1120

"In cases where only the ladder or steps providing entrance to an above-ground privately owned outdoor swimming pool is enclosed, the enclosure shall be a square with sides of not less than six (6) feet in length.

"All above-ground privately owned outdoor swimming pools less than four (4) feet in height and containing water to a depth of more than one (1) foot must be enclosed." Again, it's just as easy for a small child to be walking in the dark in the backyard and fall over an 18-inch pool and drown in that water as it is to fall over the edge of a pool. It's very important that that's in there. It goes on with the different descriptions for the enclosures, from (a) to (g).

It does the same for the type of fencing. We can say that we have a fence to keep children out of a pool, but if you put all the six-inch pine boards horizontally, it's like a ladder for a child, and over they go. It's very important that you make sure that all the fences that are being constructed are going to be constructed in such a way that makes it difficult for toddlers to get into the pool. It goes on to describe the type of fencing that's required.

At the end of it, the last item in the bylaw, 6, says, "A building permit may be refused if the fences or gates do not comply with any bylaw." It becomes the responsibility of the chief building official to make sure that all the requirements in the bylaw are complied with before they can get a permit to put the pool in the yard. That's so important, because it seems to me that if we pass this bylaw and it becomes the law of the land, everyone is going to assume that it's all looked after now and we

don't need to worry. But no one is checking on the pools that don't have a fence because the municipalities don't have a bylaw. The municipalities that have bylaws will keep enforcing their bylaws, but the other ones, if that happens to be one of those that a member is the member for, if they don't have a bylaw, they will now deem that they don't need one because we have a provincial law that requires it, but we have absolutely no one out there to enforce it. In fact, they're only going to enforce it when the disaster occurs and someone falls in the pool and drowns.

That's why I really think that we're going to do more harm than good in passing this law and building a false sense of security for the population who are not presently covered by the municipal bylaws. I think we would be better served if we were encouraging, if not mandating, that all municipalities have the bylaw to protect the children in their backyards in their swimming pools.

With that, I think we should not pass this, but we should encourage the member to work towards getting municipal bylaws in place so that everyone is covered for that safety.

Mr. Jeff Leal (Peterborough): Indeed, I'm pleased to have the opportunity this morning to take a few minutes to comment on Bill 74, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools.

First of all, I want to compliment my colleague from Northumberland. This is the second bill, I believe, that he has brought forward targeted at safety measures for our children in this province of Ontario. I believe that his previous bill was dealing with children riding in the back of pickup trucks. That was an issue that was brought forward by his constituents regarding the safety of children on that particular occasion. Again, today, he has brought forward a bill dealing with the safety of children around swimming pools.

I also know, just again complimenting the member from Northumberland, that he is excited and he will be sharing some information with us in the not-too-distant future about the new owners of World's Finest Chocolate in Campbellford, Ontario, in his riding. We'll also be pleased to hear about that, as I know the member very ably represents his constituents on a variety of issues.

Getting back to Bill 74, I recall a number of years ago, former Premier David Peterson and his wife, Shelley, had a farm just south of London, Ontario. At that particular time, the Petersons were absent from their house, and a young child had got into their backyard, went under the cover of a pool and drowned. It was a very serious tragedy that happened on the Peterson farm, and I think it highlights the issue of fencing around pools in the province of Ontario. I know that this has some implications for municipalities across the province, but it's my feeling that the thrust of this bill is for this legislation to complement the municipal bylaws across the province. Indeed, I think the member from Northumberland's bill this morning will start a debate across the province perhaps to have a common standard for fencing bylaws across the province. So I see this as a very complementary piece of

legislation. Having spent some time in the municipal field and having gone through a fences bylaw review in the city of Peterborough, it's interesting—and I think the member from Oxford talked about it today on his bylaw, brought in in 1976. It shows perhaps the need to refresh some of these bylaws in the province of Ontario, because circumstances clearly have changed. No doubt if it goes to committee—a chance to have a discussion—we'll also deal with above-ground pools and in-ground pools.

I quite recall when we went through the fences review in the city of Peterborough. You get information from other jurisdictions. Certainly there's a hodgepodge right across the province. In some jurisdictions, some municipalities, there may be a bylaw that requires a fence of four feet; others, five feet; others, six feet; and some, three feet. I think the thrust today is an opportunity to bring together all the existing bylaws across Ontario and have a look at them. This legislation today, as it moves forward, can be a real catalyst to bring that about.

Fences are always very sensitive issues within the municipal framework. When you start the discussion of fences, it certainly brings out some very interesting opinions from people who may be ultimately impacted. But at the end of the day, this is about the protection of our children. I know, as the parent of an eight-year-old and a six-year-old, you're always on red alert when you take a child or children to a swimming pool because in a moment's notice something very tragic can happen. I think this legislation certainly highlights the need for parents, caregivers and others to be very sensitive with regard to safety issues around swimming pools.

We all know that if one is fortunate enough to have a swimming pool in one's backyard, it really becomes a magnet for the whole neighbourhood. People, in those hot days of June, July, August and even September, often know where their neighbourhood pool is, and they simply drop the kids off and often it's left to the pool owner to provide a significant amount of supervision for a whole number of children. It's something that we need to be very constantly aware of.

I want to commend the member for bringing this forward. As I've indicated, I think it will bring about a thorough discussion in the province of Ontario. He has provided a background sheet to us, and when you look at the very sobering statistics about the number of young people who have had tragic accidents in pools right across the province—this legislation is timely and it will lead to further discussions. I'm very pleased to support my good friend the member from Northumberland.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the bill that the member from Northumberland has brought in, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools. I'm certainly saying that we support the bill in principle. Many thoughtful and effective safety initiatives have found their way into our laws that had started as private members' bills here. I think that the member from Northumberland has brought this bill in today in respect to that: increasing the laws and safety. Children under the age of 16 in Ontario, for

example, are required to wear bike helmets. That was because of a private member's bill initiated by Dianne Cunningham, a former Conservative member from London.

When we think of children falling into pools, we tend to divide the incidents into two categories: Did the child die or did the child survive? Thanks to advances in CPR training, children often survive. I know of an incident in the Oakwood area of my riding last summer where, if it wasn't for the quick response of CPR to a young child who had fallen into a swimming pool, that child would not have survived.

We forget that in cases where a child survives there is often severe permanent brain damage that could affect the child and the family for the rest of their lives. There is no question that drowning is a risk, especially for small children. According to the Red Cross report released in 2003, the highest rates of hospitalization for near-drowning are for toddlers and infants up to age four.

1130

When we think of bills that are brought in—a lot has been mentioned by the member from Oxford and the member from Peterborough about the bylaws that are in place municipally and the fencing laws that are there. I see that in the city of Toronto it's six pages long for the municipal fencing codes. The purpose here is to provide more safety to the swimming pool aspects, but we maybe need to look at the Ontario building code and the requirement for fencing that could be implemented through the building permit process. My colleague from Oxford has extensive experience in the municipal sector and brought some good examples of what occurred in Oxford and how we can maybe implement this bill. By making it clear to municipalities that they must pass bylaws with regard to pool fencing, it could ensure that all municipalities have such laws. It would also encourage the expertise that already exists at the municipal level with respect to such bylaws to be shared by other municipalities—safer bylaws, more public education—to ensure that people are aware of the law and obey it.

I'm pleased to support this bill today in the Legislature.

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Clearly the author of this bill has a legitimate and sincere concern around public safety, especially when it comes to kids, children, young people and swimming pools. His bill, I understand, or at the very least I infer, is designed to create a minimum provincial standard. There are any number of ways to give effect to that: suggestions that the provincial building code be the guide. Clearly the author of the bill contemplates that municipalities that have higher standards than what the bill imposes should be able to enforce those higher standards.

But let me take a little bit of a different tack, because down where I come from we don't have a whole lot of private swimming pools, because we have a history of public swimming pools in places like Welland. When I was a kid we went down to the old lock in the Welland Canal, which had been converted into a swimming pool.

Mind you, if your folks weren't paying attention or weren't looking, you used the Welland Canal itself; you used the old railway bridge down by Broadway Avenue.

But one of the most fundamental ways to protect young people from the tragedy of drowning deaths is to ensure that kids know how to swim. It's so fundamental. When I was, I think, three years old—I don't know if any of you remember, but for the first round, if you didn't pass your swimming test, you got a little sinker painted green with a ribbon tied to it. That was your consolation prize. But you went back on those cold summer mornings, because the youngest kids were the earliest kids in the pool doing the swimming lessons, and hopefully you learned how to swim.

My concern is that communities like where I come from are having a more and more difficult time operating these summer recreational programs, these educational programs for kids; I'm convinced they are. The insurance issues for municipalities have become an incredible hurdle. The cost of staffing and insuring swimming programs, starting with pre-schoolers, has become phenomenal. If we're really going to talk sincerely and seriously about water safety—because, unlike some other parts of Canada, there isn't a part of Ontario that doesn't have access to water, one way or another. Swimming is a part of the culture of at least young people in the province of Ontario. It seems to me that if we're going to discuss this in a meaningful way, we've got to talk about this government's failure to address the downloading crisis on municipalities and the inability of municipalities to fund those programs that so many of us used to take for granted—the increasing load on property taxpayers. City councils and their mayors have to make some tough decisions this budget round. You and I both know that the cuts occur around summer programs along with a whole lot of other things.

So while I encourage and applaud the author of this bill for his interest in the welfare of young people when it comes to the prospect of drownings in swimming pools—and I stand with him on the issue—I want him to stand up with New Democrats on their call for this government—this government had a \$3-billion windfall in terms of new revenues last fiscal year. Did they invest it in municipalities so that the downloading could be unloaded? No, \$1.2 billion in tax cuts for banks and insurance companies—as if they needed it—\$1.2 billion of accelerated tax cuts for banks and insurance companies. And municipalities across Ontario continue to suffer, and their property taxpayers continue to suffer—the arrogance of a government that persists and builds on the eight years of downloading of Mike Harris and his Tory gang.

We're really interested in kids and kids' safety around the water. As I say, it seems to me that one of the most fundamental things you'd want to do—and I support the proposition of a province-wide standard for enclosures around pools, both in-ground and above-ground, and recognizing of course that kids drown in those little wading pools, the inflatable ones. You can drown in just

a few inches of water. It happens—and this is a tragedy—despite the best effort of parents. But it seems to me as well that if—again, Mr. Rinaldi, I stand with you in your advocacy for a province-wide standard around fence enclosures and pools. Will you stand with the New Democrats in their call for this government to end the national child benefit clawback, the poorest families in this province having, oh, 1,500 bucks a year picked out of their pockets and, if two kids or more, almost three grand a year picked out of their pockets by the provincial government? Because it promised before it got itself elected that it was going to end the national child benefit clawback. Dalton McGuinty's Liberals promised they were going to end that clawback so that the poorest families in Ontario, those very families with those very kids you say you're talking about, Mr. Rinaldi, could have a few extra bucks in their pocket. But Dalton McGuinty and the Liberals continue to pick their pockets, starting with almost 1,500 bucks a year when it comes to one kid and, for a family with two children, maybe \$2,700 or more.

What about those kids—

The Deputy Speaker: Member for Niagara Centre, I know you said you were going to take a different tack, but I didn't know how far off course you were going to go, so I would remind you it is private members' business and we're dealing with Bill 74.

Mr. Kormos: Thank you kindly, Speaker. But I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts you anticipated it, Speaker. Because we're talking about the welfare of kids here. We're talking about making the community safer for kids. We're talking about the tragedy of kids drowning. In the instance of Mr. Rinaldi, he's talking about privately owned swimming pools.

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I'm saying to you—this is what I'm saying to you, Speaker—that we can't talk about that in isolation. If we're going to talk about kids, let's talk about the one in six kids in this province that live in poverty in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. Let's talk about the kids whose moms can't afford to send them to swimming lessons in the summertime. Let's talk about the families that can't afford private swimming pools. Let's talk about any one of those 80,000, 90,000 or 100,000 industrial workers, manufacturing sector workers who lost their jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario in the last 13 months. I'll tell you this: They don't have to worry about what kind of fence to put up around their swimming pool because they can't build swimming pools, because they lost their jobs in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario. The McJobs they got in replacement, the \$8.50- and \$9- and \$9.50-an-hour jobs—again, you don't build swimming pools in the backyard.

As a matter of fact, I say to Mr. Rinaldi, you're hard-pressed to do one of those two-ring inflatable numbers that you put kiddies in, that you put the toddlers in to splash around, and that you, on perhaps the hottest of days with a bottle of Niagara Dry in your hand, may well have felt tempted to pop yourself down in.

I tell you, we're with you, Mr. Rinaldi, when it comes to the safety of kids. I say, why aren't you with us with your when it comes to the welfare of children and your government's promise to end the national child benefit clawback? Why aren't you with us when it comes to uploading the download, so that property taxpayers aren't continually hit with more and more burden of provincially mandated programs that property tax payers have to pay for, including senior citizens, who have paid for their homes at least once—maybe twice or thrice, if they put kids through university—who in their senior years are at risk of no longer being able to live in those homes because of ever-increasing property taxes in Dalton McGuinty's Ontario.

We're with you, Mr. Rinaldi. Are you with us?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): I'm pleased to join this debate and to talk about Bill 74, a piece of legislation put forward by the member from Northumberland that I support with regard to building fences around pools.

I actually wanted to speak about this issue primarily because I've had experience with this issue. As a former municipal politician, I had experience working with bylaws, which in Brampton are considerably younger than those of the member for Oxford. Ours were done in the 1990s, so they're about 20 years younger and they're also out of date. I would encourage all municipalities to have a look their pool fence bylaws and look at a way to update them and make them more current.

About 10 years ago I had the good fortune of going to the Toronto Home Show. I put a ballot in a drum and a few weeks later I had a phone call: "You've won a swimming pool"—an in-ground swimming pool. How wonderful, but oh my goodness, what a headache it was.

Mr. Kormos: Careful what you wish for.

Mrs. Jeffrey: Yes, you have to be careful what you wish for, because you have to fence the whole property. You have to have a self-latching gate, you have to make sure whatever you build is not climbable by any young person.

At the beginning of the adventure, I thought how lucky I was. I can tell you that it became a nightmare. I had an unscrupulous contractor coming in to build my free pool, who did not fence the area properly during construction, who was cavalier in his management of the safety around the project—

Mr. Kormos: Who was this gangster?

Mrs. Jeffrey: I will not name the gangster, but I certainly dealt with him a few years later when I dealt with it as a municipal councillor. I can tell you, there are a lot of fly-by-night organizations out there that install pools. Municipal officials work very hard to try to have people comply with the existing bylaws. But once they've dealt with you the first time, they never help you enforce it ever again.

As a homeowner, I had children showing up at my front door with a towel around their neck, children I didn't know. I had young people who were non-swimmers who showed up at my front door and stayed

for the afternoon. I can tell you, any effort that you can put in place that that will provide the homeowner with some guidance—and certainly a fence is one of the first steps. I agree with the previous member who spoke about education, but there are some things that you cannot prevent by education. One of the issues I would like to just briefly touch on is that Barbara Underhill, who is a champion figure skater, spoke very eloquently on this issue a few years ago in Brampton, and speaks quite regularly on the issue of safety in the family swimming pool. She left her gate open for a minute while she fetched a wheelbarrow to do some gardening, and her eight-month-old crawled out of the house, clambered down the gate and into the pool. She lost her daughter, one of a set of twins, and it happened, I think, 12 years or more ago. That was in 2005, and I know that every time I hear her speak about this, she's very, very emotional about it, and there can't be a parent out there that this fear doesn't strike.

I congratulate the member from Northumberland. I think it is the responsibility of provincial legislators to provide guidance, to set standards to municipalities for the safety of all residents in Ontario, just like my residential fire sprinklers act. I think it is the responsibility of us in this Legislature to provide guidance to municipalities, and I am happy to support this piece of legislation and to endorse it. I would do anything in my power, here or as a former municipal councillor, to prevent and reduce injuries and accidental deaths of all residents of Ontario. I think this is a very proactive bill, I think it's the right thing to do and I am happy to support it. I congratulate the member from Northumberland for his vision, because this is a great piece of legislation.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London-Fanshawe): I'm privileged and honoured to stand up and speak in support of Bill 74. I want to congratulate my seatmate, the member for Northumberland, for bringing in such a bill to protect the children in this province of Ontario. I have no doubt in my mind that the member from Northumberland is a great advocate on behalf of his constituents. I listened to him many different times in the caucus and in this place, talking about his constituents and their voice in this place and also bringing some issues to us in this place in order to fix them and solve them. Now I listen to him and listen to many speakers in this House speaking about the importance of creating some kind of protection mechanism for the youth and the children in this province, and I think it's very important.

When I was a little boy, I was walking by a swimming pool. I saw all the kids swimming. I said to myself, "Why don't I do it?" I jumped in the water. I didn't know how to swim and I almost drowned. In a couple of hours' time I found myself in the hospital, people around me; I didn't know what happened to me. But I know I went into the water and I almost drowned because it was wide open. I think it's very important to put some kind of fence around the swimming pool to protect the children, especially in a place which is open for many kids. As you know, water is very attractive to the kids, trying to swim

when they see other kids around them, and then what happens? Tragedy happens. So I think this bill creates some kind of mechanism and tool to protect our children in this province.

Also, I was listening to the member from Niagara Centre talking about downloading to municipalities, and I disagree with his opinion because our job in this bill would never do that because we believe in the partnership between the province and the municipalities. That's why our government gave, in this last budget, billions of dollars in order to create some kind of partnership to help municipalities build bridges, roads, etc. In the past, also, we paid many billions of dollars in order to share costs with municipalities. This bill is not, in any shape or form, some kind of download to the municipalities; as a matter of fact, it's a very important element to help our kids to be protected. As the member from Northumberland spoke half an hour ago, he was talking to us on his bill about what percentage of kids under five walk by a pool, jump in it and drown or else get taken to the hospital; and some of them get a brain injury. I think, for the safety of the children in this province, we have to create a mechanism for protecting the children.

1150

As you know, it's part of our government's mandate. We believe in the future of this province and in the kids, the future of our province. That's why we've created so many different programs, like Best Start.

I wish the member from Niagara Centre was here. I wish he would convince his party not to pull down the Liberal government that created a great national daycare program, that created 25,000 spots across the province of Ontario and was going to invest \$1.9 billion, all for the safety of the children, to protect the children. This is what we are talking about.

As part of our theme as a government, as part of our direction to protect the children of this province, from child care to creating fences, to bringing in many different programs in order to protect our children, I think the member from Northumberland, by bringing this bill forward, has created such an atmosphere and continues the same theme as the government, in order to protect the kids and in order to invest more in the protection of our youth in this province, because we believe strongly that we have no future if we don't invest in our youth.

I want to congratulate my seatmate, the member from Northumberland, for bringing such an important bill up. I wish and I hope that all the members from all the different parties will support this bill.

I wish the member from Niagara Centre was here to listen to what I said about national child care. I wish he would be able to convince his party not to put down or bring down the government and—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Rinaldi, you have two minutes to respond.

Mr. Rinaldi: First of all, let me thank all the folks who spoke to this bill: the members from Oxford, Peterborough, Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, Niagara Centre,

Brampton Centre, and my good friend from London–Fanshawe.

As I said at the beginning, this bill that's in second reading debate today has a lot of things that we have to improve. I really look forward to working with all the members. Some excellent suggestions have been brought forward this morning that I think need to be in this bill. So I look forward, during committee hearings, to incorporating some of those good points that have been brought forward today, and I thank them for their help.

I just need to quickly comment on some of the comments that the member from Niagara Centre brought forward when he talked about child care benefits and the lack of, the better of or the whatever of. I guess we can talk about whatever child benefits are out there, but I would ask the member, do we want to put that against the safety of a child, to prevent a child from drowning? Are we talking about dollars and cents? Are we talking about building something that we're trying to do all around the House? Although he wanted to go down that road, I really don't think it's related because, at the end of the day, we're talking about the safety of children, the safety of our future. I want to focus on that, and we'll deal with those other issues as we move forward.

To wrap up in this very short time, I want to thank the folks who helped me to bring this legislation to the House today. I think this is a good example of when all sides are working together, when good information comes from the ground up. I'm delighted and look forward to going through the process.

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION MANDATORY DECLARATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 EXIGEANT UNE DÉCLARATION AU SUJET DU DON D'ORGANES ET DE TISSU

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll deal first with Bill 67, standing in the name of Mr. Klees. Mr. Klees has moved An Act to amend various Acts to require a declaration with respect to the donation of organs and tissue on death. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will have a vote on this, but after we have dealt with ballot item 24.

SWIMMING POOL SAFETY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES PISCINES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): We'll now deal with Bill 74, standing in the name of Mr. Rinaldi, An Act respecting safety around swimming pools.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
 All those in favour, say "aye."
 All those opposed, say "nay."
 In my opinion, the ayes have it.
 We will deal with this in due course.
 Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.
The division bells rang from 1155 to 1200.

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION
 MANDATORY DECLARATION ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006 EXIGEANT
 UNE DÉCLARATION AU SUJET
 DU DON D'ORGANES ET DE TISSU

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Klees has moved second reading of Bill 67. All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Kormos, Peter	Ramal, Khalil
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Brownell, Jim	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Runciman, Robert W.
Craiton, Kim	Leal, Jeff	Ruprecht, Tony
Delaney, Bob	Levac, Dave	Scott, Laurie
Dhillon, Vic	McNeely, Phil	Smitherman, George
Fonseca, Peter	Miller, Norm	Sterling, Norman W.
Hardeman, Ernie	Milloy, John	Van Bommel, Maria
Jackson, Cameron	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Witmer, Elizabeth
Jeffrey, Linda	Munro, Julia	Yakubuski, John
Klees, Frank	Prue, Michael	Zimmer, David

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 33; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I'd ask that the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be referred to the standing committee on social policy? Agreed.

Before the next order of business, we will have the doors unlocked for 30 seconds.

SWIMMING POOL SAFETY ACT, 2006

LOI DE 2006
 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES PISCINES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bruce Crozier): Mr. Rinaldi has moved second reading of Bill 74. All those in favour, please rise.

Ayes

Amott, Ted	Kwinter, Monte	Prue, Michael
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Lalonde, Jean-Marc	Ramal, Khalil
Brownell, Jim	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Craiton, Kim	Levac, Dave	Runciman, Robert W.
Delaney, Bob	McNeely, Phil	Ruprecht, Tony
Dhillon, Vic	Miller, Norm	Scott, Laurie
Fonseca, Peter	Milloy, John	Smitherman, George
Jackson, Cameron	Mossop, Jennifer F.	Van Bommel, Maria
Jeffrey, Linda	Munro, Julia	Zimmer, David
Klees, Frank	Patten, Richard	

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed, please rise.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Claude L. DesRosiers): The ayes are 29; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): I would like to refer it to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

The Deputy Speaker: Shall the bill be referred to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs? Agreed.

All matters relating to private members' public business having now been dealt with, I do leave the chair, and the House will resume at 1:30 of the clock.

The House recessed from 1205 to 1330.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): A week after this government's pay more/get less budget, Ontario farmers continue to be outraged that they are not just getting less, they are getting nothing. At the time when farmers are deciding whether they can afford to plant for another year, the Liberal government is dealing a \$244-million cut to the agricultural industry.

When Dalton McGuinty asked for farmers' votes in 2003, this is what the Liberal platform promised them: "We will make agriculture a lead ministry in a Liberal government." The only way the agriculture ministry has led is in cuts and disappointments. Instead of standing up for farmers, the Liberal government is passing the buck. When asked to account for their Scrooge-like behaviour, they blame the federal government or the ghosts of governments past. Farmers in my riding and across Ontario don't have the luxury of scapegoats. What they have are empty fields that they can't afford to put their crops in.

Farmers are proud people, so we rarely hear about the personal toll that is being visited on families whose incomes have collapsed. Imagine the strain on a marriage when both partners are working off the farm and they still can't make ends meet. Imagine parents having to tell their children that they can't go to hockey or baseball this year because there isn't enough money to sign them up or they need to stay home and work on the farm because there's no money to hire extra farm help. As one farmer told a Toronto newspaper, "A lot of guys I know are on anti-depressants."

Our farmers deserve better than empty Liberal promises and a prescription for Prozac. They deserve a government that understands the structural challenges of farming and delivers on its commitments.

HATE CRIMES

Mr. Mario G. Racco (Thornhill): Last week, a constituent of mine, Bernie Farber, CEO of the Canadian Jewish Congress, launched a pamphlet to combat hate on

the Internet. CJC, in conjunction with the Centre for Research Action on Race Relations, sponsored a hate crimes information flyer to aid in the fight against hate.

On the CJC website, www.cjc.ca, the people of Ontario and Canada can anonymously report Internet hate. Today, I wear the badge produced by CJC to promote this initiative. It says, "Stop Internet Hate."

Canadians are protected by the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. While these laws are effective for residents of Canada or websites hosted in Canada, they do not protect us from those hosted outside of this country.

Residents of Thornhill were recently shocked when an elderly Holocaust survivor opened her door to find a swastika spray-painted there, and some unfriendly words. By raising awareness of one's rights and responsibilities when it comes to hate crimes, the CJC hopes to stop Internet hate. This initiative encourages us to stand up for our freedoms and rights while protecting one of the most treasured features of our province and country: diversity.

I commend the CJC for launching this initiative and look forward to continuing to work with them to eliminate racism, discrimination and intolerance.

MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): The members saw yesterday probably the beginning of the closing remarks of the current Minister of Education here in the province of Ontario, moving on to the federal level, and of course wish him well. I did want to note, though, that a couple of people weren't clapping. I think their Bob Rae buttons were getting in the way, which I found a bit curious. But all the best to the minister.

As finance critic, I am always willing and able to give suggestions every time to the Premier and cabinet on how to save money. My suggestion is, instead of doing a cabinet shuffle for education, simply appoint the Minister of Transportation to both ministries, transportation and education. After all, if you listen to the Integrity Commissioner's report, he's the hardest-working man in cabinet, running a ministry and maintaining a full-time job. In fact, he could probably make the offices of both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Transportation at the Chalmers Group and save a lot of time and expenses.

After all, we haven't seen progress on some major transportation issues. The GTTA has been announced and re-announced, I think three times, without progress. The rollback promise on the 407 tolls—well, they've actually rolled up even higher. The mid-peninsula corridor seems to be dead, and the extension of the 407 east through Durham region—we have not heard about that in a long, long time from this government.

Another suggestion—school closings—well, he could pay the Edelman group to run a campaign against the school boards in Spain and then close more schools.

This might not be like research on the sex lives of squirrels, but it might just be nuts enough to get Dalton McGuinty's approval.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): Yesterday, just prior to the House beginning, the three House leaders—the government, opposition and New Democratic Party House leaders—agreed that the order of today would be the amendment to the Assessment Act, and I hope the government lives up to its promise.

This is what the Canadian Press story by Steve Erwin had to say about it yesterday:

"Duncan has promised to extend the deadline to the end of June to give homeowners time to review an Ombudsman's report that recommends changes to the crown corporation that conducts property evaluations.

"But while Duncan insists he wanted to pass the bill on Wednesday, he claims the New Democrats, which along with the Conservatives must consent to its speedy passage, are stalling.

"NDP critic Peter Kormos, however, charged back that three parties had already agreed to debate and pass the bill Thursday and that Duncan is trying to get the bill done a day early so he can get pro-Liberal newspaper coverage Thursday morning—just before voters head to the polls in three Ontario by-elections.

"Clearly Dwight Duncan is eager to get himself a headline in the morning of the provincial by-elections," a fired-up Kormos told reporters at the Ontario Legislature.

"It similarly indicates to me that the Liberals are increasingly worried about any one of those three by-elections."

"Kormos and Conservative House leader Bob Runciman say they had agreed earlier Wednesday with ... Deputy House Leader ... Caplan to debate and pass second and third readings of the bill on Thursday."

He carried on, and he looked sincere, for the purposes of Hansard:

"Mr. Duncan has inserted a level of cynicism into this Parliament that is disgusting and disgraceful," Kormos said.

"I'm not convinced that he's the brightest bulb in the box. But it seems to me that he somehow thinks so; otherwise he wouldn't have overridden the decision that his House leader made on behalf of the Liberals."

REGENT PARK

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): On February 14, 2006, I attended phase one of the Regent Park community housing revitalization project. As a former chair of the Toronto Community Housing Corp., this project has special significance to me. The project began under my tenure, and less than three years later, I'm deeply pleased to see a historic new beginning for Regent Park, home for over 7,500 Torontonians.

I would like to congratulate the residents of Regent Park and the dedicated staff of the Toronto Community Housing Corp. for their courageous efforts in making the revitalization of Canada's first and largest social housing property a reality.

I would also like to applaud Minister Smitherman, Regent Park's dedicated MPP, for his support of the Regent Park community and for all his hard work over the years in making this dream of revitalization a reality.

This \$1-billion revitalization project will transform the Regent Park community into a modern, mixed-income neighbourhood with attractive new retail space, daycare facilities, beautiful parks and 5,100 new homes.

In the 2006 budget, we promised to create approximately 15,000 new and improved affordable housing units for Ontarians. Thanks to the inspiring efforts of 7,500 residents of Regent Park, the local community, Minister Smitherman, Minister Gerretsen and the Toronto Community Housing Corp., we are now one step closer to achieving that goal.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds–Grenville): Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know, many communities, sectors and regions of our great province feel left behind, neglected and ignored by the recent McGuinty Liberal budget.

Mr. McGuinty and his Toronto-centric Liberal government have clearly decided that good politics for them is to focus resources on one municipality to the detriment of many others, especially small towns in rural Ontario. This strategy is not only cynical, it is in the short and long term harmful to the social fabric of Ontario.

What the Premier and his yes-men and -women in the Liberal backbenches are doing is driving harmful wedges between Toronto and much of the rest of Ontario. Liberal backbenchers representing regions outside of Toronto are keeping quiet, but what's even worse, defending this harmful strategy and attacking those who express concern.

The McGuinty Liberal budget is not province-building. It is potentially very damaging. I urge Liberal backbenchers to do the job they were elected to do and stand up for the people who elected them, the people depending on them. Don't turn your back on your friends and neighbours. Don't do it.

1340

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. John Wilkinson (Perth–Middlesex): Today I'm honoured to welcome to Queen's Park the Kidney Foundation of Canada volunteers, staff, health professionals and especially people affected by kidney disease for Kidney Health Day. Today's events are designed to raise awareness of the risk factors for kidney disease and to talk about strategies for prevention. I want to thank the Minister of Health Promotion and his parliamentary assistant for their participation today.

The month of March holds a special significance for those affected by kidney disease. Each year, the Kidney Foundation of Canada and its thousands of dedicated volunteers in Ontario head out, door to door, to raise

funds for research, education and to support the people affected by kidney disease.

Thanks to over \$73 million in research grants since 1964, people living with kidney disease have access to better therapies and expanded treatment options, leading to improved outcomes and quality of life. Yet the numbers affected are growing steadily.

An aging population and an increasing incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease are among the factors contributing to the rising demand for treatment. There are an estimated 15,000 Ontarians on dialysis or living with a kidney transplant. Over 1,300 people are waiting for a kidney transplant, some for as long as 10 years. The number of patients is increasing at an annual rate of 10%, with no end in sight.

Early detection and management of kidney disease can improve patient outcomes and save health care costs. As well, increasing the number of organs available for transplant will save the lives of many Ontarians.

I would ask my colleagues to have a special welcome for our guests from my riding, Dr. Rena Orr and her son Jamie Cottle, who are here visiting with us today.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey (Brampton Centre): Last week, Minister Duncan announced Move Ontario, a new \$1.2-billion investment in public transit and municipal roads and bridges.

As part of Move Ontario, I am delighted that Brampton is receiving \$95 million to support the AcceleRide program. AcceleRide buses will better link Brampton to Mississauga, York region, the TTC and GO Transit by enhancing transit along the east-west Queen Street corridor and the north-south Hurontario-Main Street route. This investment will put more buses on the road at key intersections and on routes that will have queue-jump lanes and signal priority. As well, Brampton will be equipping bus stops with real-time information displays, letting passengers know how long they will have to wait until the next bus comes long.

This multi-million dollar funding means that AcceleRide can move forward immediately, and rapid transit buses will be rolling along Queen and Main Streets by 2008-09.

This announcement is historic. It is the largest amount of funding that has ever been given to the city of Brampton. Our government recognized the need to invest in transportation infrastructure and is committed to relieving traffic congestion. We're working with communities to seamlessly move people and goods across this great province.

Congratulations to Brampton city council and Mayor Fennell for doing their homework and putting forward a strong proposal. This investment will transform my community and expand public transportation, not only in Brampton but across Ontario.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Phil McNeely (Ottawa–Orléans): I rise in the House today to congratulate Premier McGuinty and Minister Duncan on an excellent, successful budget this past week. Ontarians should be proud of this government's investment in the province's infrastructure, education and health care.

Like everyone here, I believe that investing in our people is the one and only way to contribute to the prosperity of our province. That is why I was happy to see the investments in Ottawa's education infrastructure. This budget allocated funds for Algonquin College, Carleton University, La Cité Collégiale and the University of Ottawa.

In Orléans, we were also very happy to see funding for cultural and tourism infrastructure in the city of Ottawa. The Ministry of Culture has allocated \$11 million for cultural infrastructure for Ottawa, and of that funding, \$2.5 million will go toward the East End Arts Facility in my riding of Orléans.

Finally, the McGuinty government is investing in the health of Ontarians by providing more than \$123 million for health care and over \$500 million for health care infrastructure in the Ottawa area. This will extend the Montfort and Queensway Carleton Hospitals, as well as the cancer centres at the Ottawa and Queensway Carleton Hospitals. It will also provide the funding for a new, publicly owned Royal Ottawa Hospital.

This year's budget holds nothing but good news for the people of Ontario and of Ottawa. We are continuing to invest in the areas that matter most to Ontarians. We are protecting our health, improving access to post-secondary education, safeguarding our at-risk youth and expanding training and employment services. We can now look forward to a prosperous future because we are investing in the people of Ontario.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO WORKERS'
MEMORIAL ACT, 2006LOI DE 2006 SUR LE MONUMENT
COMMÉMORATIF DES TRAVAILLEURS
DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Ramal moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 86, An Act to establish the Ontario Workers' Memorial / Projet de loi 86, Loi visant à ériger le monument commémoratif en hommage aux travailleurs de l'Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The member may wish to make a brief statement.

Mr. Khalil Ramal (London–Fanshawe): Ontario workers are the lifeblood of this province's economy. Their talents and skills have made Ontario the most

important economy in this country, thus contributing to Canada's becoming one of the best-performing economies in the world. Our day-to-day lives are touched by Ontario's workers, whether it be by the cars we drive, the food we consume, the buildings that house us or the streets and roads that pave our province's way to success.

Unfortunately, many of this province's workers have been lost to accidents while on the job. Ontario has become strong based largely on their efforts; therefore we should recognize those whose lives were lost in making this province great.

I'm looking forward, when this bill comes back to the House for debate, to getting the support of all members of this House.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): I seek unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. Mr. Bentley: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 96(d), the following change be made to the ballot list of private members' public business: Mr. Murdoch and Mr. Hudak exchange places in order of precedence such that Mr. Murdoch assumes ballot item 48 and Mr. Hudak assumes ballot item 28.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

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ORAL QUESTIONS

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): My question is to the Premier. Premier, you have said recently that a Canadian is a Canadian when it comes to our finances in Canada. I will assume that, by the same reasoning, that means that an Ontarian is an Ontarian.

We support investing in the GTA, although we do oppose your bogus bookkeeping. If an Ontarian is an Ontarian, can you tell me why so many ridings outside of the GTA, many represented by your side, by McGuinty Liberals, are left out of your budget entirely?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I can only conclude from that question that the leader of the official opposition can't be talking about the budget that we presented in this Legislature just a short time ago, because it is a budget that continues to invest in opportunity for the people of Ontario. It adds to the first budget, which invested heavily in health care for Ontarians, and the second

budget, which committed us to Reaching Higher, which is all about investing not only in elementary and secondary education but beyond that, to post-secondary education—again, something which benefits all Ontarians.

In this last budget, we're investing heavily in infrastructure, particularly in public transit, roads and bridges. The people of Hamilton are getting some \$20 million; Ottawa, \$33 million; Sudbury, \$10 million; Thunder Bay, over \$8 million; Windsor, over \$8 million; London, over \$14 million; Kitchener-Waterloo, over \$22 million. So I'm not sure where the leader of the official opposition is coming from when he says that people outside of the GTA are somehow not benefiting from this budget.

Mr. Tory: The fact is that many of your own members and their ridings have been left out of this budget. Don't take it from me; let's take it from the London Free Press. The London Free Press represents the interests of many of your MPPs and the constituents in the London area. You referred to an amount there. What they said was this: "Finance Minister Dwight Duncan's Toronto-centric budget yesterday offered little to the London region and kept the province in a deficit position despite revenues \$2.25 billion higher than expected." That's what the London Free Press had to say.

Clearly, there is a problem here, Premier, if an Ontarian really is an Ontarian. Either your members aren't speaking up or you're not listening to them. Which is it? Because you have not delivered for the people of London in terms of doing the kinds of substantial things for that area of this province that they require. Which is it? Are you not listening, or are they not speaking up, or both?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I guess it really didn't take that long for the true colours of the Ontario so-called Progressive Conservative Party to reveal themselves to Ontarians once again. This is a party that is firmly dedicated to sowing division and discord, pitting one group of Ontarians against another group of Ontarians.

When we invest in health care, we invest in health care for all Ontarians. When we reduce class sizes in the early grades in our public schools, we do that for all Ontarians. When we fund insulin pumps, we're doing that for all Ontario children. When we invest in 60,000 grants for young people who are going to college and university, we are doing that for all Ontarians. That's the approach we bring on this side of the House. They may be interested in sowing discord and division; we're all about bringing people together and moving forward together.

Mr. Tory: The Premier seems very sensitive about this. All I was doing was actually quoting the London Free Press. It wasn't me who said this, so you should phone them up and perhaps tell them they're trying to sow division by simply speaking up on behalf of the people of London, Ontario, which is what your members should be doing. When it comes time for 2007, we'll put some people in the Legislature who will speak up for London.

Let's move on, then, to the Stratford Beacon Herald headline from March 24, the day after the budget, where it said, "Farmers Fuming." I guess they're people who

are divisive agents in Ontario as well. The article goes on to state that farmers in the Perth-Middlesex riding "used a post-budget breakfast hosted by MPP John Wilkinson this morning to slam the budget." We've not heard a member's statement on that one from the member for Perth-Middlesex. We hear from him on many other things.

What is your government doing for the farmers in Perth-Middlesex and, for that matter, farmers across Ontario, other than cutting \$244 million from the spending proposed for the Ministry of Agriculture?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: A few facts are always helpful when it comes to consideration of these matters. I want to remind the leader of the official opposition that we are proud to have invested \$800 million in income support for farmers during the course of the past three years. Just recently, he will know that we put forward another \$125 million to help the farmers who are in desperate straits.

I want to remind him as well that when it comes to the city of London—again, just so we have the facts before us, because they are not entirely irrelevant in this House—we're investing \$14.3 million for road costs, \$13 million for municipal assistance—that was assistance, by the way, that was not there under the previous Conservative program—and \$6 million for the gas tax.

I guess the other thing I would want to say to the leader of the official opposition is that it's really hard to figure out where he's coming from on this. In his reaction to the budget, he said, "We should balance the budget. We should cut taxes. We should upload programs. We should put more money into agriculture, more money for rural Ontario, more money for transit and more money for roads and bridges." That's how you end up with a \$5.5-billion deficit.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): New question.

Mr. Tory: My question is for the Premier. In terms of magic, the only guy who has created a deficit around here of billions of dollars, when you could have balanced the budget and should have, is you.

To the Premier again: You've basically left Sarnia out of your budget plans too. Your member for Sarnia should be up in arms and red-faced over what the Sarnia Observer had to say: "Sarnia-Lambton received scant attention but that's nothing new." How could you and the local McGuinty Liberal member allow this to happen, and what are you going to do to fix this for the people of Sarnia-Lambton?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: Again, the leader of the official opposition cannot possibly be referencing the budget that we introduced in this House, because there is all kinds of good news in there for the people of Sarnia, as there are for people throughout.

The member opposite will want to know that in this budget we're investing another \$4.5 million for roads and bridges in that community. Of course, our investments in schools will benefit the people of Sarnia. Our investments in health care will benefit the people of Sarnia. Our investments in our post-secondary institutions will benefit the people of Sarnia. The investments

in infrastructure—you know, one of the other things that we're doing is uploading. Actually, what we're doing is we're going to participate in a true and genuine partnership when it comes to sharing land ambulance costs. That will benefit the people of Sarnia as well as uploading some of the public health costs.

I've said it before: In an ideal world, we would be able to undo the downloading damage done by the previous government instantly, but we can't. We're going to take our time, but we're certainly moving in the right direction.

Mr. Tory: No one has talked more about fixing downloading and done less than you, and that's the truth.

Let's move on to Kitchener. Did the member from Kitchener Centre tell you at all about the wait times that are through the roof in Kitchener? Did he confront you with these statistics for Grand River: cancer surgery wait times, up 23%; hip replacements, up 124%? Or for St. Marys: angiography, up 10%; angioplasty, up 4%?

The Waterloo–Wellington LHIN: Did the member for Guelph–Wellington talk about that: angiography, up 34%; angioplasty, up 4%; hip replacements, up 107%; knee replacements, up 9%?

Have your members from Kitchener Centre and Guelph–Wellington asked you to explain to them and, better still, to their constituents why they are paying hundreds of dollars more in McGuinty health tax and the waiting times are going through the roof on your watch? Can you explain that?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I can understand why the people of Ontario are confused when it comes to the host of positions taken by the leader of the official opposition. He, over the previous five questions, keeps making reference to the fact that we're apparently not spending enough in a variety of communities. We have made some choices. The leader of the official opposition is saying that we should balance the budget and we should cut taxes and we should be spending more money. I gather that, overall, he's just not supportive of a budget, which tells me that he's not supportive of our determination to invest more in smaller classes; he's not supportive of our initiative to improve student assistance with 60,000 grants this year; he's not in favour of this new subway line that we're going to put in place to connect the 416 and the 905. We've taken a stand. We've made some choices and we're proud of those.

Mr. Tory: Of course, as we all know, one of those choices includes creating a false deficit that's going to cost the taxpayers of this province \$50 million a year of their hard-earned money just so you can play political games with their finances.

Now let's move on to Chatham. You know, I keep quoting these newspapers, these agents of division that are sowing the seeds of revolution in Ontario. The Chatham Daily News, that subversive publication: "There's nothing to directly stimulate small business, which is the core of Chatham. There's almost more to talk about with what's not there than what is there." That's from a local business leader. Your budget did nothing to help the people of Chatham and help them

avoid a massive tax increase next year. You want us to believe that an Ontarian is an Ontarian, and yet the people of Chatham, because of your policies, are going to face a massive tax increase next year. Why have you and your local member left the community of Chatham to twist in the wind next year, and then their taxes are going to skyrocket?

1400

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I just don't understand how the leader of the official opposition can wake up every day and be so negative about this great province. He must be living in a different province from the one in which I'm living, because I'm very optimistic about our future. I'm proud of the work that we are privileged to be doing on behalf of the people of Ontario. I'm proud of the investments that we continue to make in the kinds of public services were so deeply and so badly eroded by the previous government.

The leader of the official opposition may not agree that it's important for us to invest in public schools; it may be his principal priority when it comes to education to put public dollars into private schools, but we see things differently. We will continue to improve the quality of education in all our schools, for all our children. We will continue to invest in health care and put forward new programs, like insulin pumps for children who are affected by type 1 diabetes, and yes, we will as well continue to invest in our infrastructure so we can both improve our competitiveness and our quality of life.

TUITION

Mr. Rosario Marchese (Trinity–Spadina): Premier, Ontario had a \$3-billion revenue windfall last year. Can you explain why you chose to raise tuition fees at Ontario colleges and universities?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Christopher Bentley (Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities): One of the things we had to address was 15 years of legacy left by his party and the party opposite in terms of underfunding and not addressing student aid needs. What we established was a plan based on the Rae report and the Rae recommendation, a plan that called for an increased provincial contribution to post-secondary education to improve quality and increased financial assistance. That's why last year we introduced the Reaching Higher budget—\$6.2 billion extra; that's every year in increments—\$6.2 billion extra for post-secondary education and skills training, of which a quarter, \$1.5 billion, is to improve student financial assistance. It was the right course and it was the five-year course. In fact, the member opposite has criticized the fact that we outlined spending increases for five years. He doesn't like long—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Marchese: I would just remind the minister that of the \$6.2 billion that he is promising, \$4.3 billion will

come after 2007, when they may or may not be here. Ontario has some of the highest tuition fees in the country and they're climbing higher. You told students and their parents that you couldn't afford to extend the tuition freeze. Then, on budget day, they learned that you a \$3-billion windfall. Banks and insurance companies get a capital tax cut. Why didn't you offer relief to students and their parents?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Another example of why the NDP suffered through some of the biggest budget deficits in history: They don't understand the difference between one-time money and continuing expenditure.

I think one of the questions students all across the province are asking is, why is that member so passionate about tuition today? When he was a member of the government, a 50% increase over five years. Where was the fire? Where was the passion? Where was the caring? Why did they cut out the up-front tuition grants for the poorest students in the province? Last year we introduced it for families up to \$36,000. This year we extended that for families up to \$75,000. That's 60,000 extra students getting upfront tuition grants. That's real accessibility for the poorest, most vulnerable students in the province. That's where our compassion lies.

Mr. Marchese: Perhaps, Minister, you can afford to be so smug when you have a ministerial salary, but most middle-class families do not have that same luxury. Now we see how things work in Dalton's little world here in Ontario. If you're a bank that needs capital tax cuts, you get results, but if you're a working family, a middle-class family, struggling to educate your kids, you get empty promises—the same empty promises you made to parents with autistic kids, parents suffering under the clawback and parents waiting for ESL.

The NDP has made a simple proposal: Extend the tuition freeze until the next election. You have the money. Why are you refusing to do it?

Hon. Mr. Bentley: Under our student financial assistance proposal, 180,000 students are going to receive assistance of some sort. The amount of assistance is up by 27% from the time we took office but the repayable portion has not increased one penny, so every extra dollar above \$7,000 in assistance is a grant. Sixty thousand students are getting upfront tuition grants. A total of 120,000 students will get a grant of some description: \$1.5 billion into student financial assistance and additional dollars into the access committees to help first-generation students, aboriginal students, francophone students and persons with disabilities.

The member talks often about his freeze bill, but students and families across this province should remember that when he had the chance, tuition increased 50%. When the member talks freeze, the rest of Ontario is going to catch cold.

PROPERTY TAXATION

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. In his report, Ontario's Ombudsman said that a taxpayer appealing an MPAC decision

was like a "David versus Goliath" mismatch. Yesterday, the leader of the third party asked you about two recommendations Mr. Marin directed to your government. They are two very simple recommendations: (1) to make it mandatory for MPAC to tell taxpayers how it comes up with the assessed value of their properties—pretty simple—and (2) for MPAC to fully justify its assessment on appeal, i.e. reversing the onus. Why are you delaying on doing this?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The member has quite properly identified the two recommendations that the Ombudsman referenced to the provincial government. We will be bringing in legislation once we've done a consultation. I'm sure we'd want to hear from the municipalities, which are the major shareholders of MPAC. I'm sure we'd like to determine the cost of implementation so that taxpayers who will pay for this will have a sense of it. I'm sure we would all like to hear from the Information and Privacy Commissioner with respect to how this information is held.

Where we've been able to move quickly, we've moved quickly. For instance, there is a bill that I understand will be passed in the Legislature today with respect to extending appeals on property tax.

We will be consulting. We will be responding in due course. My hope is that we'll hear from the third party and others on their views as to how to make the system work better.

Mr. Prue: The problem with taking too long to study this matter, which you've known about for a long time—a member in your cabinet prepared a report two years ago, which we've never seen, talking about the difficulties with MPAC and with property assessment—is that there are tens of thousands of individuals and families who are in the process of appealing. They don't have the information, because it's denied, and right now the onus is upon them. What about the tens of thousands of people who are in the process now? Do they have to wait until next year?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, we have already implemented a number of the changes that came out of the Colle report—I refer all members to a press release dated March 10, 2004—which has been referenced a couple times. It was a very good piece of work. The changes were actually debated and discussed in the House, and they made a lot of sense. Perhaps the members were asleep when the discussions were going on, but the fact is that the discussions occurred in this House.

The previous government attempted to reform property taxes seven times. They messed it up seven times. We are going to move prudently but with haste to address the concerns. I remind members that of the 22 recommendations, 17 have already been—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Final supplementary.

1410

Mr. Prue: The Ombudsman was clear in his report that there were two things you could do. He made very concrete proposals, and I don't believe anyone we've heard from—the public, the mayors, anyone at all—is saying that they cannot or should not be done. My question to you is, how long will the people of Ontario have to wait to have a system that is balanced, that is fair, that is going to give them an opportunity to have a justifiable appeal in which the onus is not upon them and in which they have all the facts? Clearly, if you believe in justice, you would do it right away.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: This government is going to act in the best interest of taxpayers.

Let me quote what this member said on October 15, I think in Ottawa. He said, referring to the NDP, that the party “is in the gestation of looking at some kind of official policy,” and the party will definitely have a position on property taxes in time for the 2007 election. The NDP doesn't want to share its ideas too early. Well, let me share our ideas: We're cleaning up MPAC in a way that no one thought we would and we're cleaning up a mess left by Mr. Tory and his party. We have addressed 17 of 22 recommendations that were contained in the report. There are two that require legislative change, and we do believe, frankly, that it does take a little time to talk to people, including taxpayers, assessors and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. That's the right way to do it.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE TO BUSINESSES

Mr. John Tory (Leader of the Opposition): A question for the Premier. The finance minister is hallucinating again today. The Premier will know that as a result of an act of nature, a huge sinkhole opened up at Highway 7 and Jane Street. This is not a question about your budget, by the way, but it could be. This has caused, as the Premier will know, traffic chaos, but it has also caused a lot of heartache for local businesses. Customers can't get to their stores and their offices. We have now learned there are people who are on the brink of losing their homes and their businesses and of course the jobs that go with them. You have been asked by the local member whether there is something your government could do to help these people, who are affected by an emergency, by an act of nature, so they won't lose their businesses over the next couple of months until the road is fixed. Are you prepared to do something to help these people, to make sure these businesses are not lost and don't go under while the road is being fixed? Are you going to help them?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): This is a municipal issue, but having said that, I appreciate the leader of the official opposition bringing this to my attention. I've heard about it before. In fact, I've heard about it from a number of people who raised the issue.

Let me say this: We stand at the ready. I know Minister Kwinter, who has the principal responsibility for emergency-related issues, stands at the ready to lend whatever support we might to assist the city in any way they feel we might be helpful.

Mr. Tory: I appreciate the Premier's willingness to look at it. We want to just maybe firm that up a touch. These people are on the brink. It's been a long time now, and it's nobody's fault. It's an act of nature, and they are trying to get it fixed. Mother Nature continues to erode the sinkhole and so forth. But these people are out of money. There was a story published recently saying that one of these people actually mortgaged their house to pay their employees so they could keep their business going.

My question is this: Would you be willing to come back to this House on Monday—because tomorrow is Friday and that gives us the whole weekend and Friday to look at it—and have someone report to this House on specifically what you're going to do to help these businesses get through this period of time while the construction is completed so they don't go out of business? Are you prepared to report back on Monday?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: I appreciate the sincerity behind this request. What I will do is undertake to have Minister Kwinter look into the matter and see what specifically, if anything, we might do to lend assistance.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): To the Premier: You have insisted that communities aren't going to lose health services as a result of your health integration scheme. Can you explain, then, why Scarborough General Hospital is planning to remove services?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): The Minister of Government Services can speak to this.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): There's no decision on that. One of the hospitals is in the area I represent; it's called Scarborough Grace. The other is called Scarborough General. At one time I was chair of Scarborough General. What that hospital is doing is what I think we would ask every single hospital in the province of Ontario to do: How can we deliver quality services in the most effective way? I am proud of that board looking at how we can improve the quality of the service in Scarborough in the most cost-effective way. They're looking at those options. I think we should be applauding boards in Ontario.

There's no intention of diminishing services. The commitment is that the Scarborough Grace Hospital will stay open forever, that the emergency will stay open 24/7 and that obstetrics will stay there. But apart from that, the board is looking at how we can improve the quality of care for the people of Scarborough in the most cost-effective way, and I think that's a good idea.

Mr. Kormos: Sir, you keep insisting that we've reached some sort of glorious new age in health care, but out there on the ground across Ontario all that folks are seeing is cuts. Can you explain why the F.J. Davey home

in Sault Ste. Marie is going to be firing half of its registered nurses in June of this year?

Hon. Mr. Phillips: Again I'd say to the member, if you look at the health care budget in Ontario, it has gone up dramatically. I think the increased investment over a five-year period is about \$34 billion. Our Premier recognized the need to enhance health care. He called on the people of Ontario to help with that. The opposition say that they don't want to do that. They do not want the \$2.4 billion of health money that we've asked of the people of Ontario to help with health care.

That's \$34 billion over a five-year period in health care. We are making a major commitment to ensuring that the quality of health care in Ontario is second to none. I'm very proud of that record, very proud of the record across the province of Ontario.

HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

Mr. Jean-Marc Lalonde (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Yesterday, the member for Lanark-Carleton addressed a question to the Premier. In his question he referred to last week's budget. I was stunned to hear a member from the Ottawa area coming up with that sort of question. Being a former PA for transportation, I was overjoyed with the amount of money Ottawa is getting, especially the riding of Lanark-Carleton. Either the member for Lanark-Carleton has not read the budget correctly or he just wants to play politics on the day before a by-election is to take place in Nepean-Carleton. The people of Nepean-Carleton are smart people.

Minister, can you tell us, beside the amount referred to yesterday, how much more money is going to be allocated to Ottawa and to the riding of Lanark-Carleton for the widening of Highways 7 and 417?

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): I would like to thank the member for asking this question. I'm sure the member opposite already knows the answer to this question, but let me repeat it for him again. On July 29, 2005, my colleague the MPP from Ottawa-West Nepean, Minister Jim Watson, announced the construction of Highway 7 from Highway 417 to Carleton Place. It's a 22-kilometre project, about \$108 million in cost. This project will be constructed in different phases.

In addition to that, there are other investments we are making in the Ottawa area. For example, on Highway 401, we are investing \$19.7 million in construction from County Road 34 to the Quebec boundary; on Highway 60, we're investing about \$11.9 million in resurfacing between Douglas and Eganville; and then again on Highway 60, we are investing another \$5.6 million in reconstructing truck climbing lanes for the road. So the—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. There may be a supplementary.

Mr. Lalonde: Minister, listen to this. Yesterday a constituent from the riding of Lanark-Carleton expressed his concern to me about his MPP's question. Being aware

of the extra money announced last year by the McGuinty government for the widening of Highways 7 and 417, the constituent went as far as asking me if his member was misleading his constituents.

1420

Interjections.

The Speaker: You can't do indirectly what you can't do directly. So I'd ask you to change the phrasing of that question.

Mr. Lalonde: I am ready to withdraw it, but it's not me who said that, it's his constituent.

Minister, since the member doesn't seem to want that money—

Interjections.

The Speaker: Order. Just withdraw the word.

Mr. Lalonde: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, since the member doesn't want this money for the widening of Highways 7 and 417, should this money be allocated to another sector in the province? Is that what—

The Speaker: Thank you. The question has been asked.

Hon. Mr. Takhar: I think the Leader of the Opposition has already indicated that we make our investments on a needs basis. That's how we make our investments. We don't consider it on a partisan basis.

But let me tell you what else we have done in the Ottawa area. Out of the \$400 million we announced for roads and bridges, Ottawa will be getting \$33 million in gas taxes. They got \$27.4 million this year. In other transit investment, they got about \$22.9 million. So there is a lot of money that Ottawa has been getting. In addition to that, we have approved their transit project, which is a \$200-million investment by the province, but it's a \$600-million investment in total.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Robert W. Runciman (Leeds-Grenville): I have a question for the Premier. Following last week's provincial budget, it became readily apparent that many residents of communities outside Toronto, especially in small towns and rural areas, were shocked and disappointed by your government's failure to address their needs. One of those areas was the provincial riding of Northumberland. Premier, can you advise the House and the good people of Northumberland if the MPP for that area has made you aware of his constituents' widespread concerns over your budget?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The member for Northumberland is a tireless advocate for the people of his constituency. You could learn something from him, I say to Mr. Runciman. If only every member worked as hard as the member for Northumberland. All the members on this side do; they certainly do.

Let me tell you what the reaction is. The people of Northumberland know that we've invested \$800 million in three years for income support for our farmers. They know that the \$400 million in roads and bridges money is aimed at rural and northern municipalities, and it's helping many of the them in ways that they never anticipated.

This government is undoing the downloading of that government. We're uploading land ambulance costs to a full 50%, thanks to the lobbying efforts of the member from Northumberland. That member and his government downloaded the cost of public—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Runciman: That response just confirms that the Minister of Finance is out of touch with reality.

In the Northumberland Today newspaper, the headline is, "Local Farmers Fry Rinaldi with Budget Accusations." In the Independent newspaper, Gene Brahaney, a beef farmer and lifelong Liberal, says he is "greatly disappointed and very angry." He goes on to say, "It looks like the Premier is buying the vote of Toronto and to the rest of Ontario, he's just saying goodbye." That's from a lifelong Liberal.

Does that sound like contentment? Does that sound like your MPP is doing his job? I ask the Premier, why are you muzzling Liberal MPPs representing small-town, rural Ontario? Why won't you let them represent their constituents?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The people of Northumberland have 7.5 million reasons to re-elect the member: That county got \$7.5 million in roads and bridges. That member has helped ensure that more young children in JK through grade 3 are in class sizes of less than 20. It's because of the work of men like Mr. Rinaldi and many others on this side of the House that our health care wait times are coming down.

That party and that government left a deficit—a number of deficits. A health care deficit: The people of Northumberland, because of Mr. Rinaldi, are having that deficit reduced. On skills and education, that party took money out of schools. Because of members like Mr. Rinaldi, we're putting money into schools. On the infrastructure road issue, again, \$7.5 million this year alone. Mr. Rinaldi should be congratulated for the work that he does on behalf—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

AGRICULTURE FUNDING

Mr. Peter Kormos (Niagara Centre): A question to the Minister of Agriculture: Twenty-four days ago, Stephen Webster parked his car at Queen's Park and said he wasn't going to leave until Dalton McGuinty did something to help Ontario's farmers. Why is Mr. Webster still parked outside Queen's Park?

Hon. Leona Dombrowsky (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs): I would offer that the best person to answer that question would be Mr. Webster. What I would offer, though, is that what the Premier has

done through the most recent budget that was presented in this House was to very clearly identify that our government is aware of the very serious, urgent and pressing need in the agriculture community in the province. That is why, two weeks before the budget, we announced \$125 million to support the grains and oilseeds sector. That includes \$80 million for grains and oilseeds, \$35 million for fruit and vegetable growers and \$10 million for traceability.

In addition to that, there is a commitment in the budget document that says very clearly, "We are responding to the requests that we have received from farmers across Ontario for a multi-year partnership with the federal government."

The Premier has made it very clear: We are at the table; we are ready to roll up our sleeves, get to work and do what the farmers in Ontario need us to do.

Mr. Kormos: Mr. Webster is parked outside because you have done next to nothing for Ontario's farmers. A farmer I talked to said that for every \$100 he has lost, he is only getting 12 bucks back from you. What about the dairy heifer operators decimated by the BSE crisis? You've done nothing for them. That's not farm assistance; that's an insult. How much longer is Stephen Webster going to have to camp out in his car before you deliver the multi-year farm assistance plan that farmers need to stay in business?

Hon. Mrs. Dombrowsky: I would offer that the wait will continue until Ottawa comes to the table. That's what we're waiting for. We have been ready for months to sit down with the federal government and establish a partnership that will better support the agriculture industry in this province. We are ready. We have listened to farmers and we are prepared to work on their behalf.

I would offer that Mr. Webster might better spend his time in Ottawa and make his issues known to the federal MP's, and everyone else on that side of the House should do the very same thing. This is an urgent issue. We have been pressing the federal government and we will continue to do so for the farmers of Ontario.

ONTARIO FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a question for the Minister of Culture. Minister, you recently announced the extension of the enhanced 18% tax credit rate for film production services to March 2007. We know that a strong and sustainable film and television industry is a major contributor to Ontario's economic prosperity and quality of life, and that film and TV production generates almost \$2 billion annually for our provincial economy and accounts for thousands upon thousands of people working, usually through small businesses. But some of the critics are saying that this is still not enough. Minister, what are you doing to ensure the continuing growth of film and television industry in Ontario?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Culture, minister responsible for francophone affairs): I would like to thank the member from Davenport. I know he's a great supporter of culture.

It is important to point out the progress and the success experienced in Ontario film and television industry. We should be proud of the quality productions created here in Ontario. We believe we have the right combination of people, expertise, facilities, sites and now the financial incentives to protect Ontario's position as the number one film and television production centre in Canada.

An increase in our tax credits allows Ontario to remain competitive internationally. As the vice-president of Cinespace Film Studios put it, "The current boom is absolutely a result of the tax credit increases. All the producers we talk with tell us the new incentives are what is turning heads in LA."

1430

Mr. Ruprecht: These are very strong measures, and I would hope that the opposition would also clap for it. I didn't see any of them clap for this kind of a measure.

These initiatives are strong examples of our belief in and recognition of the important role of the film and television industry in Ontario. More and more domestic and foreign productions are choosing Ontario to make their films and television series. Shows like *ReGenesis*, filmed in Hamilton, *Slings and Arrows* and many others are doing great here.

This is very good news indeed, but with spring here and summer around the corner, and film crews cropping up all over the place, concretely what do all these announcements really mean for Ontario and for Toronto specifically?

Hon. Mrs. Meilleur: Let me give you other examples of the success in Ontario. In 2004 and 2005, Ontario experienced the highest level of production activity, with an increase of 5%, to reach \$1.85 billion. Ontario represents 41% of Canada's total production sector.

After we took government, foreign location production in Ontario rose by 53% in 2004 and 2005. This sharp increase demonstrates that Ontario's service producers were able to manage the effect of the increase in the Canadian dollar, as well as compete with other jurisdictions for Hollywood productions, thanks to the tax credit increase introduced by this government.

In the last budget, we gave \$7.5 million to help our entertainment and creative cluster, plus \$23 million to OMDC to help the sector. So I'm sure that this summer you will see more and more film crews around Queen's Park.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie-Lincoln): The question is for the Premier. I'll call your attention to the Niagara Falls Review editorial of March 24 this year entitled, "Liberal Budget Focuses on Toronto, Ignores the Rest of us." The editorial says, "Jokes referring to Toronto as the centre of

the universe have been around for years, but Thursday's budget should worry Ontario residents outside Cabbagetown that the provincial Liberals think it's true." Niagara Falls Mayor Ted Salci goes further and says, "I don't think the province has responded strongly enough to the needs of municipalities outside the GTA."

Premier, I wonder if, when you cross the Burlington Skyway leaving Toronto, you think you've entered New York state. Why did you turn your back on the people of Niagara?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): Let me just read what some mayors from outside the GTA have said about this budget. Hamilton Mayor Larry Di Ianni: "We have a lot to be thankful for," said an excited Mayor Di Ianni. "This is really a communities budget."

Let me read you what the mayor of Peterborough said: "Toronto's needs are greater than the rest of the province. They've recognized that there's something beyond the GTA."

Let me read to you what the mayor of Timmins has said: "Certainly, this budget sounds excellent for Timmins."

The mayor of Windsor, my hometown: "The announcement in Thursday's budget that the municipalities will now be given more leeway in how they spend their share of the \$1.4 billion in transit funding from provincial gas tax rebates was ... welcomed," said Mayor Eddie Francis.

The mayor of Leamington: "It's certainly going to help the municipality. We've got a lot of roads and bridges we certainly want to work on."

The mayor of Waterloo, Ken Seiling: "We made it into the budget. That's a good thing."

The mayor of—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Hudak: Rather interesting. I asked a question about Niagara, and the minister talks about everything but. I think it must be true that when you cross the Burlington Skyway, you think you end up in New York state.

Poor Kim Craiton is doing his best to defend Dalton McGuinty, but trying to defend Dalton McGuinty's budget in Niagara is like trying to swim up Niagara Falls. You just can't do it because there's too much weight of evidence coming down hard on you.

Port Colborne Mayor Ron Bodner said, "Niagara did not show up on the radar screen. Our job as politicians is to remind" these guys "there is life south of Lake Ontario."

Albert Witteveen from the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture says that farmers got nothing in your budget.

Minister, when did you decide to write off Niagara? Why did you decide to do it? And did you tell Kim Craiton that you made that decision?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: Because of Kim Craiton, we're investing \$1 billion in the Niagara tunnel, something you didn't do in eight long, painful years; \$300 million between Sarnia and Niagara for their border crossings and infrastructure, something you didn't do in eight long, painful years; and in this year's budget, \$3 million in additional OMPF funding, \$1.6 million for roads and bridges and \$894,000 in gas tax.

Kim Craiton has stood up for Niagara in a way you never have, sir—never. You should listen to him. You can learn from him. With good members like Kim Craiton, the region of Niagara—I know Kim Craiton. Kim Craiton is a friend of mine, and he's a darn better member of this Legislature than you'll ever be.

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches—East York): My question is to the minister responsible for democratic renewal. Madam Minister, yesterday I asked you a very simple question: Why should Ontarians believe you will honour a referendum, and the referendum result, should Ontarians decide to change the way in which people are elected to this Legislature? You sent the question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and what he said I think sent shivers down the spines of anyone who believes in democracy. He admitted that he ignored the ballot results, he admitted that the people's vote meant nothing at all and he said that there was now a new criterion that it had to be made up of the elected representatives and that they were going to have to set brand new criteria before anything would happen. Is this your plan too?

Hon. Marie Bountrogianni (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, minister responsible for democratic renewal): What a ridiculous comparison. He just can't take the good news that we are having a citizens' assembly to examine our electoral system. The honourable member was on the select committee. He knows how serious this government is. He knows how serious the Premier is. If the citizens' assembly recommends a change, it will go to referendum. We have promised this. We will do it. We will deliver this.

Mr. Prue: The word that's been left out and that I keep looking for is "binding," a binding referendum; that this government, this Legislature, will be bound by the results, not in the way that you and the Premier committed to be bound by the results in Kawartha Lakes, but a real binding, so that if the people speak, what they vote for actually happens. That's what we want to know. So I'll just go right to that. Will you put it in the legislation to bind the government on the results of the referendum, or will you end up playing the same game you played with the people of Kawartha Lakes?

1440

Hon. Mrs. Bountrogianni: In fact, we don't even have referendum legislation in Ontario. Your government didn't do it; their government didn't do it. We are going to introduce legislation for referendums in the province of Ontario in the event that the citizens' assembly does

recommend a referendum for a change in electoral systems. I'm very proud that our Premier has taken this political risk, has put the partisan politics behind him to give the people a choice to possibly change the system that got us here and that got you here at one point, because it's the citizens' choice, not the politicians' choice, with respect to how we should vote for our politicians. I'm very proud of our Premier for his courage and of our government for standing by him.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): My question is to the Minister of Finance. Minister, Scarborough is one of the fastest growing regions in the province. As you know, previous to 1997, it wasn't a part of the megacity of Toronto; it was a city on its own. But as all the members of the House are aware, you tabled the McGuinty government's budget, its third budget, last week. Residents in my riding have for a long time had an interest in public transportation. I wanted to know what the city of Scarborough will be receiving and, in particular, what kind of new funding will it be receiving as a result of your budget.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): To the member opposite, due to his efforts and the efforts of all of our members from Scarborough, we've included \$1 million for the next step of environmental assessment for the Scarborough rapid transit. We think that's an important step, something that was missing for far too long in this province.

In addition, we believe very strongly that all the people of Ontario will benefit from our investments in infrastructure, whether they live in Scarborough, Durham region, Windsor, North Bay, you name it. Those investments are important. They're important because improved public transit, improved roads and bridges and services will mean a stronger economy, a more efficient economy. Because of members like the member opposite and his colleagues from the Scarborough area, we were pleased to include \$1 million to Scarborough to move to the next phase of extending public transit through Scarborough in a better fashion.

Mr. Berardinetti: Thank you for that, Minister. A supplementary question: Many residents in my riding have asked me questions as well about the transportation budget. They've indicated to me that they were concerned that perhaps the subway line should not have gone westward but perhaps should have gone eastward, and were looking at some of the funding issues there. Could you please tell the House what steps you and your ministry have taken or that the government has taken in general with regard to funding announced for environmental assessment on the subway and, in particular, other initiatives taken for the citizens of Scarborough that are included in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Duncan: The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Harinder S. Takhar (Minister of Transportation): First of all, I would like to thank the member for Scarborough Southwest for this question. Our government is very much committed to making sure that we can keep our people and goods moving, because we feel the quality of life and of the economy depends on it. Let me tell you that since October 2003, we have given over \$700 million to the city of Toronto for public transit. This is in addition to \$670 million for the Spadina subway that will go up to the Vaughan Corporate Centre. A couple of examples: the \$1 million that the Minister of Finance talked about for the environmental assessment; we have this year also given \$200 million to Toronto for TTC subway operations. We have given \$33 million, one-time funding, which can be used by the TTC transit vehicles; \$52 million last year under the OTVP program to the city, and \$20 million again for subway improvements—

The Speaker: Thank you. New question.

ONTARIO BUDGET

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound–Muskoka): I have a question for the Premier: Tomorrow, March 31, is the day that the doors will close at the paper mill in Cornwall. Five hundred people will lose their jobs; \$50 million in lost wages will be the result, \$1.3 million in lost taxes for the city of Cornwall. The local newspaper, the Seaway News, says, “Will Cornwall Survive Domtar’s Closure?”

The Seaway News, in another article, states, “The Domtar closure will certainly be causing a butterfly effect directly or indirectly for a great majority of people in this community, personally and professionally.”

Premier, what was in your budget for 500 people who will lose their jobs tomorrow in Cornwall?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): To the Minister of Natural Resources.

Hon. David Ramsay (Minister of Natural Resources, minister responsible for aboriginal affairs): I’d like to say to the honourable member, as I’ve said to many people in northern and eastern Ontario where they have felt the direct impact of the restructuring of the forestry sector, that in dealing with that sector and the restructuring that’s going on, it was so important to the McGuinty government that we couldn’t even wait for this budget. We made an announcement last year, as you know, of \$680 million. Again, the Premier made an announcement five weeks ago of another \$220 million. We couldn’t even wait for this budget to get that news out, because we have to help that industry. We’re working with Domtar—they have many sites across this province—and of course we’re working with the local member also in regard to restructuring the industrial base of the city of Cornwall.

Mr. Miller: The truth is that the budget did precious little for the people of Cornwall. In fact, looking at some of the newspaper articles, the Sudbury Star says, “Budget a Slap in the Face to Rural Ontario.” Its says, “This is

pandering to the urban majority and virtually ignoring the breadbasket of the province. It is an insult, a slap in the face for small-town Ontario.” Farmers in the Cornwall area are also suffering. The Standard-Freeholder in Cornwall states: “‘Obviously, we’re not a priority to our provincial government,’ said Newington area dairy farmer Tammy Hart. ‘We are on a breaking point right now. I don’t know what more we can do. You’re going to see farmers disappear. They’re disappearing as we speak, even around here.’”

Why isn’t the member from Stormont–Dundas–Charlottenburgh speaking up for the 500 people who lost their jobs at Domtar, who are going to see their final paycheque tomorrow? Why isn’t he speaking up for these farmers who are just barely hanging on?

Hon. Mr. Ramsay: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Dwight Duncan (Minister of Finance, Chair of the Management Board of Cabinet): The member has, in fact, done just that.

Let me read you what the mayor of Cornwall had to say about this government’s efforts, and I hope you’ll pay attention: “All those meetings, all those proposals, finally paid off,” Poirier said. “I knew all along we were going to get something. They, the province, owned up to their promise to help.” Yes, the mayor’s absolutely right. We did that: \$5 million directly to Cornwall.

In addition, we created something called the jobs and skills renewal strategy, which takes \$2.1 billion, money that was negotiated with the federal government by our Premier, money that would not have been available, and that money is being used to assist individuals, not only people on social assistance to help get them off, but to help get the underemployed, the unemployed, more and better work, to help them participate in the economy that’s blossoming in this province, the economy that has produced 85,000 new jobs in the last year. I say to the member opposite, you ought to speak to the mayor of Cornwall—

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Thank you. New question.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): My question is to the Premier. During the budget, while the budget was being read out by the finance minister, we all noticed that your colleagues, your caucus, clapped long and hard on your plan to reduce corporate taxes by \$1.2 billion in the year 2007. At the same time, there was no money for poor children, there was no money for the clawback, there was no money for children with autism. The Minister of Finance subsequently said that maybe next year he might be able to find a few pennies for these poor individuals. You have already committed \$1.2 billion in 2007-08 for big banks and big insurance companies that have never had such profitable years. Why have you not committed \$220 million to end the clawback? Why have you not committed the millions it will take to end autism and to actually give autistic kids a chance?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: To the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: First of all, let's set the facts straight: There's not a \$1.2-billion tax cut in 2007. That's patently false. This year, it's more like \$60 million, and even when it's fully rolled up, it will be a lot less than the figure you've quoted. Unfortunately, the member opposite simply doesn't want to deal in fact.

Number two, Mr. Speaker, I'll remind you that that member voted against rolling back all the Tory tax cuts. He's trying to have it both ways. All the corporate tax cuts the Tories did—

Interjections.

Hon. Mr. Duncan: You voted against them. I think that member ought to tell the thousands of his constituents who are employed in the financial services sector in Toronto, who have made it one of the most competitive, why he wants to undermine the future sustainability of their jobs.

Banks and insurance companies employ people in your riding, sir. You ought to be ashamed. You ought to speak in favour of them, and you ought to work with us to help ensure that Toronto remains the most competitive place for the financial service sector in the world.

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PETITIONS

ORGAN DONATION

Mr. Frank Klees (Oak Ridges): I have literally thousands of signatures on a petition which reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

"Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

"Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

"Whereas the private member's bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver's licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006."

I am pleased to affix my signature to this petition and also to confirm that this Legislature passed second reading of this bill today.

MUNICIPAL RESTRUCTURING

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): I have a petition signed by hundreds of people and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Dalton McGuinty, MPP, as leader of the official opposition, made the following commitment: 'I have committed that a Liberal government will ensure a binding referendum is held to allow local citizens to determine whether or not to dismantle the amalgamated city'; and

"Whereas, in the interest of true democracy, the Minister of Municipal Affairs put the following question to the voters of the city of Kawartha Lakes: 'Are you in favour of a return to the previous municipal model of government with an upper-tier and 16 lower-tier municipalities?'; and

"Whereas the voters, by a clear majority on a provincially mandated ballot, answered in the affirmative; and

"Whereas the council of the city of Kawartha Lakes has demanded that the province of Ontario honour the results of the 2003 election as it pertains to the minister's question;

"The undersigned demand that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario act to honour the commitment made by Dalton McGuinty and to respect the will of the people as expressed in a democratic vote, and restore the former municipal structure as stated in the minister's question."

I am in agreement and would affix my signature thereto.

MACULAR DEGENERATION

Mr. Kim Craitor (Niagara Falls): I'm pleased to introduce this petition on behalf of my riding of Niagara Falls, and thank Gladys Plato and Grace Weaver for signing it, as well as many others. The petition reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the government of Ontario's health insurance plan covers treatments for one form of macular degeneration (wet), there are other forms of macular degeneration (dry) that are not covered,

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"There are thousands of Ontarians who suffer from macular degeneration, resulting in loss of sight if treatment is not pursued. Treatment costs for this disease are astronomical for many individuals "and add a financial burden to their lives. Their only alternative is loss of sight. We believe the government of Ontario should cover treatment for all forms of macular degeneration through the Ontario health insurance program."

I am pleased to sign my signature in support of this petition.

ORGAN DONATION

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas 1,920 Ontarians are currently on a waiting list for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas the number of Ontarians waiting for an organ transplant has virtually doubled since 1994; and

“Whereas hundreds die every year waiting for an organ transplant; and

“Whereas greater public education and awareness will increase the number of people who sign their organ donor cards and increase the availability of organ transplants for Ontarians; and

“Whereas the private member’s bill proposed by Oak Ridges MPP Frank Klees will require every resident 16 years of age and older to complete an organ donation question when applying for or renewing a driver’s licence or provincial health card, thereby increasing public awareness of the importance of organ donation while respecting the right of every person to make a personal decision regarding the important issue of organ donation;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass Bill 67, the Organ and Tissue Donation Mandatory Declaration Act, 2006.”

IDENTITY THEFT

Mr. Tony Ruprecht (Davenport): I have a petition to the Parliament of Ontario and the Minister of Government Services. It reads as follows:

“Whereas identity theft is the fastest-growing crime in North America;

“Whereas confidential and private information is being stolen on a regular basis, affecting literally thousands of people;

“Whereas the cost of this crime exceeds billions of dollars;

“Whereas countless hours are wasted to restore one’s good credit rating;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, demand that Bill 38, which passed the second reading unanimously in the Ontario Legislature on December 8, 2005, be brought before committee and that the following issues be included for consideration and debate:

“(1) All consumer reports should be provided in a truncated ... form, protecting our vital private information, such as SIN and loan account numbers.

“(2) Should a consumer reporting agency discover that there has been an unlawful disclosure of consumer information,” or a breach, “the agency should immediately inform the affected consumer.

“(3) The consumer reporting agency shall only report credit-inquiry records resulting from actual applications for credit or increase of credit, except in a report given to the consumer.

“(4) The consumer reporting agency shall investigate disputed information within 30 days and correct, supple-

ment or automatically delete any information found unconfirmed, incomplete or inaccurate.”

Since I agree, I’m delighted to sign this petition.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Joseph N. Tascona (Barrie–Simcoe–Bradford): I’m pleased to present a petition to the Legislative Assembly, which reads as follows:

“Whereas the price of gas is reaching historic price levels; and

“Whereas provincial and federal governments have done nothing to protect consumers from high gas prices; and

“Whereas provincial tax on gas is 14 cents per litre and federal tax is 10 cents per litre, plus 8% GST; and

“Whereas these taxes have a detrimental impact on the economy and are unfair to commuters who rely on vehicles to travel to work; and

“Whereas the province has the power to set the price of gas and has taken responsibility for energy prices in other areas, such as hydro and natural gas; and

“Whereas we call on the province to remove the 14.7-cents-per-litre gas tax and on the federal government to eliminate the 10-cent gas tax, plus 8% GST, which amounts to 30% or more” of the price of gasoline at the pump;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario and urge the Premier to take action and to also persuade the federal government to remove its gas taxes.”

I support this and affix my signature.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It’s a pleasure to read another petition on fair share spending.

“Whereas the spending on most social services has been frozen since the early 1990s under both the Rae and Harris governments; and

“Whereas the population of the region of Peel has approximately tripled in that time period and the social risks have increased;...

“It is now noted that the people of the region of Peel receive 50% less funding on a per capita basis than the average provincial per capita funding for social programs and that other high-growth regions in the province such as York region are similarly affected;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Community and Social Services correct this imbalance in their new programs and through the reform of the funding formulae for its old programs within a three-year time frame;

“That the Ministry of Children and Youth Services continue to correct this imbalance in their new programs and introduce fundamental reform of their funding policies to correct this imbalance within the next three years as well.”

I affix my signature to this petition and give it to page Justin.

1500

LONG-TERM CARE

Mr. Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): I have a petition signed by a great number of my constituents, including a number living almost next door to me. It's a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We, the undersigned, who are members of family councils, residents' councils and/or supporters of long-term care in Ontario, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase operating funding to long-term-care homes by \$306.6 million, which will allow the hiring of more staff to provide an additional 20 minutes of care per resident per day over the next two years (2006 and 2007)."

I affix my signature as I agree with the petition.

SOCIAL SERVICES FUNDING

Mr. Bob Delaney (Mississauga West): It's a pleasure to read a petition on this very special day in Legislature, which is Kidney Health Day. We've got some exhibits in room 247, along with free checks of your blood pressure.

I have a petition from the Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Centre. I want to thank Hazel Henry for gathering signatures from a group of residents at 3439 Fieldgate Drive. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the population of the region of Peel has approximately tripled over the past decade and a half, and the social risks have increased;

"Whereas demand for services has exploded as a result of population and other changes;

"Whereas the people of the region of Peel receive 50% less funding on a per capita basis than the average provincial per capita funding for social programs and that other high-growth regions in the province such as York region are similarly affected;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Community and Social Services correct this imbalance in their new programs and through the reform of the funding formulae for its old programs within a three-year time frame;

"That the Ministry of Children and Youth Services continue to correct this imbalance in their new programs and introduce fundamental reform of their funding policies to correct this imbalance within the next three years as well."

I have signed this petition and ask page Olga to carry it for me.

HIGHWAY 35

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton-Victoria-Brock): "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas modern highways are economic lifelines to communities across Ontario and crucial to the growth of Ontario's economy; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Transportation has been planning the expansion of Highway 35, and that expansion has been put on hold by the McGuinty government; and

"Whereas Highway 35 provides an important economic link in the overall transportation system—carrying commuter, commercial and high tourist volumes to and from the Kawartha Lakes area and Haliburton; and

"Whereas the final round of public consultation has just been rescheduled;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Liberal government move swiftly to complete the four-laning of Highway 35 after the completion of the final public consultation."

I appreciate the city of Kawartha Lakes Chamber of Commerce collecting the petitions.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti (Scarborough Southwest): I have a petition that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the people of Ontario expect the government of Canada to honour existing agreements with the government of Ontario;

"Whereas provinces and territories negotiated agreements with the federal government to ensure Canadians would have access to early learning and child care programs that are high quality, affordable, universally inclusive and developmental;

"Whereas parents in Ontario have demonstrated a high demand for greater access to high-quality early learning and child care programs;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement with the government of Canada would provide Ontario families with at least 25,000 new high-quality, regulated child care spaces in the first three years;

"Whereas Ontario's early learning and child care agreement represents a \$1.9-billion investment over five years in high-quality early learning and child care;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support the government of Ontario in calling on the government of Canada to honour Ontario's early learning and child care agreement, for the sake of the thousands of Ontario families who would benefit from it."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature to it and give it to page Leah, who's with me today.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Norm Miller (Parry Sound-Muskoka): I have a petition from students in the Bracebridge area. It's to do with grade 12 mathematics curriculum changes. It says,

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Education plans to remove the study of derivatives from the grade 12 mathematics curriculum; and

“Whereas the grade 12 university preparation course Advanced Functions and Introductory Calculus is designed for students intending to study university programs that will involve calculus; and

“Whereas the course currently provides an introduction to the fundamental concepts of calculus, which are also required in grade 12 physics; and

“Whereas it contains three strands: advanced functions, in which students explore the properties and applications of polynomial, exponential and logarithmic functions; underlying concepts of calculus, in which students develop an understanding of the basic concepts of calculus by analyzing the rates of change involved in applications; and derivatives and applications, in which students develop, consolidate and apply to graphing and problem-solving the rules and properties of differentiation; and

“Whereas all of these strands are requirements for most university programs, and to remove any of them from the high school curriculum will leave the students of Ontario at a disadvantage when compared to the students from other provinces;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To ensure that the Ministry of Education continues to retain all parts of the current grade 12 mathematics curriculum and stop making changes that put the future careers of Ontario students at risk.”

I support this petition.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): This completes the time allocated for petitions.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): Pursuant to standing order 55, I rise to give the Legislature the business of the House for next week.

On Monday, April 3, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 78, student achievement; in the evening, government motion 82.

On Tuesday, April 4, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 53, City of Toronto Act; in the evening, second reading of Bill 190, Good Government Act.

On Wednesday, April 5, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading, Bill 14, Access to Justice Act, 2006; in the evening, second reading, Bill 78, student achievement.

On Thursday, April 6, 2006, in the afternoon, second reading of Bill 56, emergency management.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I seek unanimous consent to move a motion respecting consideration of Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act.

The Speaker (Hon. Michael A. Brown): Is there consent? Yes; agreed.

Hon. Mr. Phillips: I move that, notwithstanding standing orders 69(a) and 79(b), the orders for second and third reading of Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act, may be called today.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

MORE TIME TO APPEAL ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 PORTANT PROROGATION DU DÉLAI D'APPEL

Mr. Phillips, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation foncière.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I'm proud today to rise to speak on Bill 85, the More Time to Appeal Act. I will be splitting my time with the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

This is an important bill. As members of the House are aware, the Ombudsman released a report earlier this week on MPAC and the property assessment system. Given that the deadline to appeal assessments is this Friday—tomorrow—the Minister of Finance yesterday introduced the More Time to Appeal Act. This bill proposes to extend the deadline to appeal assessments for the 2006 year from the March 31 deadline to June 30, providing property owners with more time to appeal.

I urge all members of the House to support the bill and support property owners in Ontario. This will give them more time to appeal.

I'd like to leave it now to the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge to elaborate more on the bill.

1510

Mr. Wayne Arthurs (Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge): I'm equally pleased today to rise in support of Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act. As Minister Phillips just indicated, this is an important bill and one that I would strongly urge all members of the House to support.

This bill is about fairness. This is a bill that will help property owners in the province of Ontario. This bill is going to help property owners in my riding of Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge. It's going to help homeowners in the ridings of Erie–Lincoln and Beaches–East York, and business owners in communities such as Welland and Leeds–Grenville. If passed, for the 2006 taxation year,

the current taxation year, this bill will extend the March 31 deadline to appeal property assessments to June 30 this year. That's a 90-day extension on the appeal period.

I'd like to take just a moment or two to elaborate on how we've gotten to the point we're at today. This process began some several months ago when André Marin, the Ombudsman, stated he would be conducting an examination into MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. He said, "I'll have to look at two specific areas, the first being a lack of transparency in the property assessment system"—this item referred to property owners' complaints that they were not made aware of the criteria upon which their assessments are based—"and secondly, efficiencies in the process by which assessment appeal decisions are handled." This item essentially referred to the fact that property owners who received assessment reductions from the Assessment Review Board did not have those reductions applied by MPAC from one year to the next. In effect, a reduction in their assessment may have garnered them some reduction in their tax bill in the given year, but immediately the assessment went back up to where it had been in previous years.

Earlier this week, after thoroughly examining these issues, Monsieur Marin released his report. If I may, I'd like to take this particular opportunity to reiterate what the Premier and the Minister of Finance have said repeatedly in these past few days.

First, we thank the Ombudsman for his report and his recommendations, and as a government we always welcome suggestions for improvement. But I'd like to point out that most of the issues in this report deal with internal processes and procedures of MPAC, which is an arm's-length organization of this government; 20 of the 22 recommendations made in the report are directed to MPAC regarding disclosure and accuracy of information and procedural fairness in the appeals process.

MPAC is an organization that strongly believes in transparency and openness. Recognizing how fundamental that is to building trust in the property assessment system, MPAC has said that they can implement 17 of the 20 recommendations that apply to them. Recognizing the importance of these issues, the Minister of Finance immediately wrote to MPAC to request their analysis of the cost and operational requirements for implementing these recommendations. Let me assure the House that these 17 recommendations will be implemented. That is because they are significant and because we as a government, and MPAC as an organization of government, want to address this issue and move forward and make progress in this particular area.

Some of the recommendations that will be acted on will increase transparency. For example, MPAC will be standardizing its inspection audit reports and providing the Ombudsman with the results of inspection audits and quality reviews for 2006 as they become available. I know the minister will be watching closely as that recommendation and the other 17 are costed out and, more particularly, implemented.

Furthermore, MPAC has said they will report back to the Ombudsman within six months on the progress being made. Let there be no mistake: This is an ongoing process of improvement. We remain committed to maintaining a fair property tax system that's transparent and accountable for the taxpayers in Ontario.

When the Ombudsman released his report on Tuesday, the minister also asked that input be sought from the municipal sector through both the Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the city of Toronto. That input will be used to further advise MPAC as they move forward on implementing the Ombudsman's recommendations. But our response to the report, quite frankly, doesn't end just there. We've taken careful note of the two recommendations that the Ombudsman directed to the province of Ontario directly; namely, (1) the scope of assessment information that is made available to the public, and (2) the onus of proof of assessment on those appeals. These recommendations would require legislative change. They'll be given serious consideration. We will be consulting with stakeholders as we deliberate over these important issues in the coming weeks.

But again, our response to the release of the report doesn't end there. Yesterday Minister Duncan introduced this particular bill that we're debating here today in an attempt to provide more time to property owners who wish to appeal their assessment, particularly recognizing the deadlines that they're facing. Given the fact that the Ombudsman's report has just come out, we feel that this is the fair and appropriate thing to be doing. This bill, as I said earlier, will extend the current deadline for appeals from tomorrow to June 30th of this year.

I hope, as I'm sure all of us do in this Legislature, that this will provide a real opportunity for taxpayers in the province to get the relief that they might be entitled to. I very much hope that all members will be supporting this bill today. I already know—that's our belief—that the member from Beaches–East York will be supporting the bill. The member, two days ago in the House, proposed we put forward this very piece of legislation, except the member suggested the extension be for 30 days.

Mr. Michael Prue (Beaches–East York): At least.

Mr. Arthurs: At least 30 days. We're going a step further and extending the deadline by 90 days. I hope that the member will urge his fellow caucus members and the members of the official opposition to vote in favour of this bill. I hope that members of the opposition will give this bill very serious consideration today.

Members from the official opposition know that they created a problem and left our government to deal with it. I'd like to remind everyone that it was a Tory government that created MPAC, and as recently as this month the member from Erie–Lincoln has acknowledged the problems with MPAC today. Those problems, pointed out by the Ombudsman, were created by his party.

We recognize that we inherited a system that isn't perfect, but that's why we're acting on this report. And that's why we're hoping this particular piece of legislation will get passed today. I urge every member of the

Assembly to support this legislation today and allow homeowners, should they feel a need to appeal, an opportunity to do so in an effective way for an extended 90-day period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Time for questions and comments.

Mrs. Liz Sandals (Guelph–Wellington): I just wanted to respond briefly to the comments from the Minister of Government Services and the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance. I think it's important to emphasize to the viewers the speed with which we have acted on this particular issue. The Ombudsman released his reports on Tuesday and made a number of recommendations, which are really internal investigations for MPAC, the assessment corporation. The normal deadline for appealing would be March 31. That's tomorrow.

What we have done is that, in that time period between Tuesday and now, we have tabled a bill, and it is being debated today. We certainly encourage everyone in this Parliament to get together and unanimously give this bill consent so that it can be passed today, so that the deadline can be extended for three months to give people an opportunity to appeal.

I certainly know that there were some chords that the Ombudsman struck and put in his reports that had some resonance with me. For example, the Ombudsman raised the issue of the frustration that people feel when they appeal their assessment and win and have their assessment reduced, only to find that when their notice comes from MPAC the next year, that increase has been re-introduced, and their win at appeal ignored. That's one of the issues that the Ombudsman has asked MPAC to have a look at and see what they can do to address that particular problem.

So it's certainly good news that we are giving citizens of the province additional time to appeal, and I encourage all members here this afternoon to expedite passage both at second and third reading.

1520

Mr. Tim Hudak (Erie–Lincoln): I'll have a chance to speak further about this bill and the issues surrounding it momentarily, but the member from Guelph had talked about how quickly, as she characterized it, the government has responded. I would hardly consider that a government that's in the third year of its mandate has responded quickly to a thing that I think members know has been an issue for some time. In fact, I'll read some quotes to this effect.

Just a few months ago, Premier Dalton McGuinty was basically doing a bit of an Alice in Wonderland routine, saying he had no intention of addressing this issue. I mean, let's, at the very least—the member from Northumberland is shaking his head. Well, I'll give you the quote and if you think the Ottawa Citizen is inaccurate—it's a quote in the Citizen.

The reality is that it was angry taxpayers, whether in Northumberland or Guelph or Niagara; it was the work of both opposition parties, who kept bringing this up in the

House; and the Ombudsman's report that we saw just a few days ago that finally lit a fire under Dalton McGuinty with that red-hot, scathing report by André Marin. That's what provoked action. So please don't say that there's been some quick reaction by the government—quite the opposite—because you're in the third year of your mandate. Even if you contain it to the debate surrounding Mr. Marin's report only, I think members know that the finance minister received this back in February. He had a bit of a sneak preview. In fact, I'm sure members heard—there was a lot of rumours about how hot the report was going to be, and there was a lot of back-and-forth. I think you'll see on page 61 of the Ombudsman's report, number 174, he says, "Some will react harshly to the Minister of Finance's response"—the initial response—"and see it as unresponsive and dismissive." That's what it was. Finally, you have been provoked into action, two and a half years later.

Mr. Prue: I didn't think I was going to stand to respond to this but I think I need to, first of all, commend the member for what he had to say and, secondly, make sure that the record is absolutely clear, because I've seen it in print and I've seen it in other places that it's not as clear as I think it should be. The request that I made in this House the other day was for at least 30 days—not 30 days; at least 30 days—and that the 90 days certainly accommodated the request I had to make at that time.

I would also be amiss if I did not tell this Legislature that I was very pleased to have heard that. I was very pleased, and I tried to say that, except I was shouted down by the very government that should have been very happy to hear that. I was pleased and, quite frankly, nonplussed, because in my four years in this Legislature I have asked hundreds of questions of members—first of all, of the Conservative government and now of the Liberal government—and I think this is perhaps the only one that was directly answered. You know, when people come to this Legislature, especially kids, and they ask me about question period, I tell them the same thing that probably all of you have said: "We call this question period; we don't call it answer period, because although the questions might be direct, the answers very often are not." This one was very direct, it was succinct, it was to the point. It was everything and more that I had requested, and I would like to thank the Premier and the minister responsible for that.

Having said that, we took the opportunity, and we're taking it today, to debate this bill. As small as it is, we believe that every bill should have debate, that all of the opinion should be canvassed and, when a bill passes, the citizens of this province know that the people who were here in charge of making the bill happen and come in to law gave it due consideration. Hence the debate today and why it was not simply passed yesterday.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi (Northumberland): It gives me pleasure to join this debate and make comments about this particular bill. There's no question about it, in the two and a half years I've been here, I've heard about the challenges facing MPAC. There are a couple of organ-

izations in my own riding that meet with me on a regular basis, suggesting ideas.

But I need to go beyond that, during my days of municipal life, when MPAC was formed. Being a self-employed person for pretty well all my life and dealing with taxation issues, when this came out, it was certainly a mess, and the more people tinkered with it, the more it was a mess. I experienced that, both as a politician and as a business person. I hear that every day from my constituents. I tell you, when Mr. Marin jumped into the fray, not only did it make me happy, but all the other people in my riding—indeed, all the people of Ontario.

As we released the report—talk about expediency. We wanted to deal with this yesterday, to give the people of Ontario the opportunity to appeal it, because time is running out. That's the question they're asking me. They couldn't get into the queue. We wanted to act the day this report came out, or the next day, but some folks wanted to play politics. So we're delighted that it's here and we're debating it. We want to pass it today so those people can get out there and appeal their properties and get the right message out. Let's deal with it. Let's get it done and get it over with.

The Acting Speaker: The Chair recognizes, in response, the member from Pickering–Ajax–Uxbridge.

Mr. Arthurs: I'm pleased to have further comments from the members from Guelph–Wellington, Northumberland, Erie–Lincoln and Beaches–East York.

I appreciate the comments from the member for Beaches–East York, particularly in the context of acknowledging that the government was preparing to act as he was asking the question, to ensure it was before this Legislature, and the importance. There's no question that debate is important. There are times, as we all know, when we need to expedite that in the public interest. This is clearly one of those times, to provide that 90-day extension of the opportunity to appeal one's assessment, and, given the sense of urgency, to wrap it up. In fact, we don't sit on Fridays, and tomorrow is the last day, so we are faced with some urgency in that regard.

The public will be the beneficiaries of this legislation. I respect and am interested to hear the debate from both the official opposition and the third party in regard to their take on the legislation, but most importantly, ideally, to see this have the unanimous support of the Legislature in the interest of the public. They have a small window left for those who are entitled to an appeal and a process by which they can get better valuation on their property. They should have that opportunity, and this is going to provide exactly that opportunity.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Hudak: I'm pleased to rise in debate on Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act. I'll just finish off with the point I was making a few moments ago, before getting into the context and the contents of my more formal remarks.

I find it a bit disconcerting to see members of the government wrapping themselves in some cloak of immediacy. In fact, it's the furthest thing from being accurate. I think we recognize, unless my calendar is

wrong, that we are in the third year of the Dalton McGuinty government. If you look through the Ombudsman's report in detail, there were a number of studies that were undertaken by MPAC internally that I would assume had landed on the Minister of Finance's desk—it may have been Finance Minister Sorbara, it may have been Finance Minister Duncan—and no action was taken.

Similarly, the then parliamentary assistant, Mike Colle, apparently had done some sort of study on MPAC and had boasted in this very House that he was going to fix the system. But that report seems to have disappeared into the ether somewhere, because we made a lot of requests for it and have yet to actually see this report that was done some time ago. It was in 2004, if members look back in Hansard, where the boasting took place.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Finance, and the minister specifically, did receive an advance copy of the Ombudsman's report and responded with a letter that, at best, would be called flaccid in terms of showing any strength in standing up for taxpayers in Ontario.

I have no doubt that the media interest in this, the strength of the Ombudsman's report, the outcry of taxpayers across the province, frustrated with the lack of Dalton McGuinty's action on this file, and a number of questions brought forward by the member for Beaches–East York, myself, other members of the opposition, finally, as I said, lit a bit of a fire under Premier McGuinty and finally provoked some action.

1530

I'll call the members' attention to page 60 of the Ombudsman's report, where he publishes the original response by the Minister of Finance, which was brief. The Ombudsman describes it as such: "Some will no doubt react harshly to the Minister of Finance's response and see it as unresponsive and dismissive. First, there is no position taken on any of the recommendations made to the Ontario government. It bears mentioning that given the nature of the issues covered in the report and the scope of its recommendations, the preliminary report was served on the Premier who wrote that the government's 'response' to our request for comments would come from the Minister of Finance. Second, the letter," referring to the Minister of Finance's letter, "contains little apart from pleasantries such as an 'acknowledgement' of our work, an iteration of a 'belief' in sharing a common goal and finally, a word of appreciation to receiving our 'suggestions.'" So a rather timid response by the Ministry of Finance, who sounded basically like they wanted to take this report and put it on the shelf, just like that review of the LCBO; you remember, where hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent by the government to review beverage alcohol in Ontario, and then Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara I think could have beaten Donovan Bailey in a sprint to get that on the shelf as quickly as possible, seeing the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of cases of beer, if you will, down the drain.

This report looked like it was heading for that mythical shelf until this really caught on with the media and taxpayer outrage. I would suspect that some mem-

bers on the government benches as well who haven't raised it in the House yet, I would assume—hopefully—did behind closed doors and gave a little kick in the behind to the Minister of Finance and the Premier to get moving on this issue. I'd ask you kindly not to proceed under some illusion, or try to spin some illusion, that there was a quick reaction by the government; quite the contrary.

Before I get into the contents of my speech, I also want to raise the unfortunate—how could I describe it, I say to my friend from Wellington—attitude, the stunt played by the Minister of Finance yesterday. There was an agreement between House leaders—the deputy House leader for the government, Minister Caplan; our House leader, the member for Leeds–Grenville, Bob Runciman; and the member from Niagara Centre on behalf of the NDP, Mr. Kormos—that a vote would take place today. The Progressive Conservatives will be supporting this legislation. We're anxious to see it pass so that a 90-day extension can take place for appeals as we get near the end of the month. But I'll remind members that an agreement was made by all House leaders to have the debate today because there are issues that I want to put out on behalf of the PC caucus; maybe other members do as well. I know that Mr. Prue has worked hard on this very issue and has important, weighty comments to make as well. I appreciate that Minister Caplan, whom I have a great deal of respect for, understood that the opposition had some points to make as part of the debate and therefore was party to an agreement to allow this debate to take place today and to have a vote this afternoon.

Unfortunately, in a fit of bravado, the Minister of Finance got up on his high horse, if you will, and demanded that all three readings take place immediately yesterday, without even a minute of debate on the topic. I find that kind of gamesmanship highly regrettable and unprofessional. I know it can be a—

Mr. Ted Arnott (Waterloo–Wellington): Especially from a former government House leader.

Mr. Hudak: Especially, the member from Wellington says, from a former government House leader. I agree. I don't know if when you move into the finance minister's office, there's an expansion of the ego, but it was rather unfortunate. I know this can be a partisan place from time to time, there's no doubt, but there has to be some level of agreement on how the rules are written, how the game is played, if you will, some degree of collegiality that exists to make sure we have adequate debate on legislation and then proceed with a timely vote, if the vote, in passing legislation in a timely way, is of essence. I do regret that and, as Mr. Kormos brought some of this up today in members' statements, about the conduct of the finance minister. I'll give you some quotes from the article that was part of CP.

“NDP critic Peter Kormos”—of course, the NDP House leader—“however, charged back that three parties had already agreed to debate and pass the bill Thursday and that Duncan is trying to get the bill done a day early so he can get pro-Liberal newspaper coverage Thursday

morning, just before voters head to the polls in three Ontario by-elections.”

Mr. Ted McMeekin (Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Aldershot): You don't believe that.

Mr. Hudak: Well, it's what the CP story had to say.

Mr. McMeekin: But you don't believe it.

Mr. Hudak: Well, I know and trust Minister Caplan. I respect Minister Caplan. I know he had been party to the agreement and then his good word was betrayed by a finance minister who is more interested in pulling a stunt for short-term gain and, I think, injuring some of the relationships between the three parties in the Legislature.

Mr. Kormos goes on to say, “Mr. Duncan has inserted a level of cynicism into this Parliament that is disgusting and disgraceful,” Kormos said.

“I'm not convinced that he's the brightest bulb in the box. But it seems to me that he somehow thinks so, otherwise he wouldn't have overridden the decision that his House leader made on behalf of the Liberals.”

Mr. Kormos is one whom we know uses colourful language from time to time that others may not always use. But certainly, in these particular circumstances, I think we would all agree that the finance minister's behaviour was regrettable and I think has hurt relationships between House leaders, which are important to ensure that the rules of the House and decorum are maintained as best as possible.

Well, enough of that. I'll get on with my opening comments.

I do again want to set some background on this legislation. The government members are trying to have people believe that there has been some lightning-like action on the MPAC file. In reality, if you read the bill in detail—and it certainly won't take you very long; it's quite a limited bill in its action—it does extend, if passed, the deadline for appeals by 90 days for this particular taxation year. But that's all it does.

The Ombudsman made a very powerful case in his report that the deck is stacked against the taxpayer relative to the corporation of MPAC. He gives, in great detail, examples of how the weight of information is in MPAC's hands and not enough information is in the taxpayer's hands. Furthermore, he talks about ideas like reversing the onus, that it should be up to the association, MPAC, to prove that it is right, instead of the current system where the taxpayer has to prove that MPAC is incorrect.

I'll get into the contents a bit later. But this notion that the 90-day extension is some sort of fix is the furthest thing from the truth. It does extend the appeal deadline. I think that will be helpful to some taxpayers, but what would be most helpful is if there is clear direction given to MPAC to adopt the recommendations of the Ombudsman that apply to MPAC. The Ombudsman characterized it quite well, I think. He used the expression a “David versus Goliath” battle; of course, David being the taxpayer defending his or her assessment of their own property's value. If the 90-day extension continues on this David versus Goliath characterization, I don't think

that's going to do much in addressing the problems if it's a continuation of existing problems for just 90 more days.

Instead, what I think the finance minister should be doing—and the Premier, if he showed some leadership on this issue—is to clearly direct MPAC to adopt the recommendations of the privacy commissioner, which I think are 20 out of the 22, if I read it correctly. The Premier and the finance minister said, “MPAC is reviewing that.” MPAC wrote a letter back. MPAC, to their credit, wrote back a substantial response on the issue, indicated which areas they would be following through with and how they attempted to do so. But I would have a lot more comfort if the Premier—if not he, then the finance minister—had directed MPAC to adopt those recommendations and to do so within the 90-day time frame, in that way shifting the balance more in favour of the taxpayer and away from MPAC. But I've heard no such direction. The parliamentary assistant didn't talk about it either. Maybe we will hear that during debate, or maybe when we come back into session on Monday, there will be some sort of direction given. But I think a taxpayer at home will be very cynical about a government that's already broken all kinds of promises simply extending a 90-day deadline, if the rules haven't changed. I think, at the very least, clear direction to MPAC from the government would be extremely helpful.

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Secondly, it would be nice to see some movement by the government on the two issues that are directed toward them. The government has indicated they'll consult on those two issues; a look at reverse onus, for example, that exists in Manitoba. But certainly, I think taxpayers would see more sincerity in the government's response if they had indicated that the rules would change and bring in some balance for taxpayers rather than by a simple extension of that existing legislation.

Let's be careful not to say that this is a speedy move—it's quite the opposite—and let's be careful not to say that this solves the problem; it doesn't in the least. Unless the government directs MPAC to adopt the recommendations within the 90 days and unless the government itself reacts—I'll have some more thoughts on that—to level the playing field and help out taxpayers, then I don't think this bill will accomplish much other than extending the same rules that are lopsided against taxpayers, as shown by the Ombudsman.

We should look back. It's not like this issue appeared out of nowhere. I think members will know full well that the then parliamentary assistant, Mike Colle, appeared to be in charge of reviewing MPAC as far back as 2004.

There was an article in the *Globe and Mail* by Jane Gadd, Friday, May 6, 2005, entitled, “Cottages: Finances. Big Tax Bite Making Waves on the Lakes. Escalating Property Assessments are Hitting Waterfront Cottage Owners Hard.” Here's some of the transcript:

“Ontario MPP Mike Colle, who is overseeing the property tax issue in his capacity as parliamentary assistant to Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, told the Leg-

islature almost a year ago”—this is last year's article, referring to a year before that, so almost a year ago, which the article cites as “May 31, 2004, that the government was committed to reforming property tax assessments.

“‘Next year, we're saying let's fix MPAC,’ Mr. Colle said” at the time.

“But this week, Mr. Colle's press secretary Sean Hamilton would say only that the minister has met with WRAFT”—that's a ratepayer group defending taxpayers from the accelerating assessments—“‘and has listened to their concerns and is reviewing the issues.’

“Asked if any change in the system could be expected by this fall, when new tax bills will be going out, he said, ‘I really wouldn't like to speculate on timing.’”

Sean Hamilton's obviously a smart fella. He didn't want to speculate on timing because I think he knew that report was going nowhere. Despite many requests from the opposition, we have yet to see a copy of what I have no recourse other than to call Mr. Colle's secret report. He did the study, he did consultations and meetings, and good for him in doing that. I know it's an issue Mr. Colle has cared about. You'll see back in Hansard he's talked about it in the Legislature as a government member and as an opposition member. But when push came to shove—his opportunity to put a report on the table and to make changes—he must have been shot down by somebody, because that report never saw the light of day.

Previous Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, in the Legislature on June 7, 2004, during question period, said:

“The piece of really good news that I have for my friend”—that would be referring to a question from an opposition member; I forget who the particular friend was at the time, but that's not the point—“is that my parliamentary assistant, the member from Eglinton-Lawrence, Mike Colle, is taking on the next phase of reforms in property tax and the problems with MPAC which we've heard about in this House. I'm sure that under his direction we're going to be able to solve this problem in a timely fashion.”

I don't know what timely meant specifically; maybe he meant it facetiously, but “timely fashion” surely would mean less than two years later.

We had a commitment by the finance minister and the parliamentary assistant at finance to investigate and make changes at MPAC, but nothing transpired. Mr. Colle talks about it on May 31, 2004, in the Legislature as well. So there we go. Now we know Mike Colle was reviewing MPAC, had been given that responsibility by the Minister of Finance, and unless members know something I don't know—and I know there are some very bright members like the one I'm looking at now who works hard for his constituents. Maybe he got the report.

Mr. Dave Levac (Brant): I've got it memorized.

Mr. Hudak: Maybe he has it memorized. Maybe you were allowed to go into a back room with a locked door somewhere, you could see the report and you could memorize it.

Mr. Levac: And then leave.

Mr. Hudak: And then you had to leave without copies. But I didn't see anything, and no report has been made public as far as I know. The minister made some reference today and held up a sheet of paper or something like that. So we'll see what he was talking about specifically. But no report, as far as I know, has been made public.

We had the finance minister and the parliamentary assistant—I'm belabouring this point—reviewing it. Nothing happened. Then here we go—the member for Northumberland, I think, was questioning me—the Ottawa Citizen of October 1, 2005, Lee Greenberg's article. It was titled, "No New Tax Powers for Ottawa: McGuinty—Premier Says No to Property Assessment Review after Double-Digit Increase." Maybe you didn't see this particular version of the Citizen, but I'll read the title again: "Premier Says No to Property Assessment Review after Double-Digit Increase." That was October 2005, not so long ago.

The member for Northumberland was getting all kinds of calls in his office. The member from Mississauga was getting all kinds in his office. The Premier said, "No, we're not going to do a review."

I'll read some more from Mr. Greenberg's article:

"In the last round of assessments, in June 2003, values increased close to 24%. The increase in condominiums was closer to 35%. In trendier parts of the city, the increases were even higher. Angry residents, confused at the volatility of the system, called for a review. Yesterday, Mr. McGuinty turned that request down." A quote from the Premier on October 1, 2005, as reported by the Ottawa Citizen: "'Are there challenges connected with that area? Yes, there are,' he said." It's a good start. Then comes the big but: "But, the Premier went on, 'we didn't run on that.'"

I don't remember the Premier running on a pit bull ban particularly. I certainly don't remember the Premier running on increasing taxes. I don't remember the Premier running on increasing hydro rates. I don't know whether that's been an excuse in the past, but apparently the Premier in October 2005 said that he was not going to pursue assessment reform because he did not run on that.

Well, there was outrage. I think we brought it up in the House probably around that period of time, and then the Ombudsman Act; like a clap of thunder, it got some attention, and then the Premier said, "Okay, we'll see what the Ombudsman has to say and we will react to that," which effectively gave him, what, another five or six months of delay, of inaction. But at least, finally, a sustained attack by taxpayers, opposition members, I hope Liberal members behind closed doors at the very least, and the Ombudsman provoked Dalton McGuinty into action.

So let's be careful in saying that the government was quick to respond. If they had acted on Mike Colle's report back in 2004, I think you could have said that with some legitimacy. At least within the first year of being in office you would have reacted with substance to this issue. But you failed to do so. In fact, many would argue

that the one bill that you did bring forward that impacted on MPAC, a finance bill—I forget the number off the top of my head—effectively either cancelled or delayed for some time the concept of assessment averaging. Certainly, if assessment averaging had been in place instead of the Liberals delaying, postponing or cancelling it, at least that would have smoothed out some of these increases. The outcry would have been there, but not as loud as it had been. So, in fact, the one bill that you brought forward that did something about MPAC, many would argue, made the situation worse because you cancelled or postponed indefinitely assessment averaging.

Let me also bring up some further points. On page 22 of his report, *Getting it Right*, the Ombudsman talks about three different studies that were conducted by MPAC themselves:

"In 2003 MPAC produced a draft report entitled, 2003 Assessment Update Post Project Review setting out the results of a 'high level review of the fourth province-wide assessment update.' The review's executive summary notes many problems with values 'rooted in the fact that data is incorrect or missing.' In a number of specific areas, the report noted that values were suspect and that properties had therefore received incorrect values." That's certainly not good.

To their credit, MPAC conducted the review. It was good to see them checking the numbers, and they deserve credit for that. Whether they acted on it enough is a question the Ombudsman brings up, and what I'll bring up, as the opposition finance critic, is, what did the Minister of Finance do about it? MPAC is under the leadership of the Minister of Finance. He makes the appointments. He has the responsibility. That's why we had this legislation brought forward by the Minister of Finance today. So what did then-Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara do about it? And what did Mike Colle, who was conducting a review around this time, do about it when confronted with this MPAC report? Or did they just sit on it?

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The Ombudsman goes on, on the same page, page 22: "MPAC also produced a report dated October 4, 2005, entitled *Post Project Review of Quality Assurance in Residential Multiple Regression Analysis for the 2005 Base Year Reassessment*, which addressed the residential multiple regression analysis for the 2005 base year reassessment."

I said a bit earlier—I think my friend from Parry Sound-Muskoka will recall—that Mike Colle was already reviewing MPAC at this point in time and in fact in May 2004 was boasting about all the good work that was going to happen. This report, as I said, was produced October 4, 2005, so some months later. "This review leaves a shadow over the integrity of the models that had been developed. It found that 7 of 29 or 24% of the models reviewed did not meet at least one of MPAC's corporate quality standards." Almost one in four were incorrect. Again I ask, when presented with this infor-

mation, when presented with this report, what did then-Finance Minister Greg Sorbara do? And certainly, what did now immigration minister and then parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Finance, Mike Colle, who was conducting a review, do with those reports?

On page 26, the Ombudsman says, "It reflects well on MPAC that it conducted these reviews," and I agree. Good for them for doing that and trying to stay on top of their models. It becomes a bit critical, though. He says, "Yet we found that MPAC management was not always as receptive to the recommended changes as we think it should be." The Ombudsman then delves into that issue in considerable detail, about the response he received from MPAC management.

The question that I bring up in the Legislature is the oversight of Ministry of Finance, the oversight of the Minister of Finance, or a special designation for the parliamentary assistant, now the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, who either ignored this, were derelict in their duties or simply chose not to act. So please don't tell me you're acting fast, because you sat on these reports.

I want to say, too, while I do have the opportunity, that I appreciate the meetings I've had with MPAC individuals. My contacts and those of my office have been very professional and very helpful in the information they've brought forward. Peter Craig from MPAC is one; Colleen Vercourteren; Rosemary Phillips as well, who works in government relations; Jason Moore is another one. I want to say that the MPAC staff whom my office has worked with have been very professional, very helpful. I believe those I've met with are fully committed to reform, and to assuring that the suggestions—actually, "suggestions" is too soft a word—the recommendations that I hope the minister will direct MPAC to enforce—I would expect that the MPAC staff I've met with are anxious to get moving and to bring some balance to taxpayers within the system.

That's enough of the history, but I think I've demonstrated my point that the government, the Minister of Finance—both Ministers of Finance—and now the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the very least are culpable for having ignored this issue for so long, for having sat on these damning reports and for reacting quite poorly when they first received the Ombudsman's report.

The other thing I would suggest to the government as well is that if they truly have had a change in attitude and want to address the issue that has been ignored for the last two and a half years, if that were truly the case, then I would suggest not only extending the 90-day deadline but also why not waive the \$75 fee? Taxpayers have to pay a \$75 fee as they go through the ARB process. So I'd ask the government to consider, in these circumstances particularly, waiving that \$75 fee. It only seems sensible, and I hope they will take up that advice to help make up for the lack of action that we've seen on this file.

I think members will recall there was a precedent September 21, 1998. The Ministry of Finance, under the

headline, "Some Property Owners Eligible for Assessment Appeal Refunds"—

Mr. Arthurs: Who was the finance minister?

Mr. Hudak: The finance minister then was Ernie Eves. Finance Minister Ernie Eves is quoted here—

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: No, no, no. This is 1998: "If a taxpayer requested a reconsideration of assessment and also filed an assessment appeal and the dispute is settled through the reconsideration process, we will refund the taxpayer's appeal fee. We only think that's fair." He talks about 1998 being an unusual year for property taxpayers because all properties are reassessed based on current value, so therefore the government announced that "some property owners will be eligible for a refund."

Are those the exact same circumstances? No. But I think it's a helpful precedent so that the Minister of Finance can go to cabinet, argue for the same, and waive the \$75 fee in light of the Ombudsman's report and the government's slow movement to act in this area.

The Ombudsman actually makes some very important points about what he characterizes as a superiority complex and clash of cultures when he talks about the divergent cultures between the ARB and MPAC. The Ombudsman comes down strongly on the side of the ARB, which uses real estate data, recent sales and the individual property, whereas MPAC is heavily reliant on its computer model. I know the Ombudsman has looked into this quite closely.

The issue I wanted to bring up the Ombudsman addresses on page 30. Connecting this report with the government, page 30, he's talking about that clash of cultures between the ARB and MPAC. "The lack of enthusiasm for ARB decisions in some MPAC circles extends beyond the MPAC's commitment to its equality-achieving model and the different levels of trust between the two institutions in the particular sales achieved for the subject property." This is the important line: "There is also the belief within MPAC that ARB's board members perform poorly and are often too solicitous of taxpayers. This attitude is most evident in the disturbing May 2005 letter that MPAC's president wrote to Mr. John Wilkinson, an MPP"—from Perth-Middlesex, I believe—"and vice-chair of MPAC's board of directors, identifying some of the issues that MPAC has with the ARB. The letter ends with Mr. Isenburg suggesting that the situations he lists 'bring into question the judgment and decision-making practices of some of the ARB members in the handing down of the rulings and/or decisions.'"

I think it does illustrate the difference in cultures between the two institutions. The point I wanted to bring forward is, what did Mr. Wilkinson do with that letter? He's there as the government appointment. He's the vice-chair. The chair is Debbie Zimmerman, a former Liberal candidate, you'll remember, in the 2004 federal election. He writes to the vice-chair, which I think is interesting, who is the MPP. I think Mr. Wilkinson would do the right thing here. He must have brought that immediately to the Minister of Finance's attention, and probably to the

Attorney General, who appoints ARB members. But again, another example, another warning sign, and no action seemed to transpire from either the Minister of Finance or the Attorney General. We'll see what kind of alacrity the government moves with on things like the reverse-onus recommendations by the Ombudsman.

They say they're going to be consulting on these issues, but again, the 90-day time frame calls into question the government's willingness to do so. We'll see if there's actual activity on this file if the government thinks that by passing this bill, and this bill only, they'll somehow dodge a bullet on this issue. I don't think that they will. I'll raise this in debate, because I think it's important, and we'll see where the government goes from here.

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On page 49 the Ombudsman says, "The province of Manitoba puts the onus on the assessor, and its system has not broken down, nor has it caused a glut of appeals...."

"The Municipal Assessment Act, the Manitoba statute that places the onus on the assessor, is not insensitive to the issues raised" by MPAC. "The approach taken is a pragmatic one, recognizing that on issues of exemption from tax or classification the burden of proof should be on the taxpayer who is most aware of the use made of the property. It also provides that if a property owner resists inspection or disclosure, the burden should shift back to the property owner."

I think that's fair enough. It's an important point. I guess the history of assessment, and the Ombudsman talks about it, compares with the Income Tax Act. We, as individuals, would probably know far more than government about our level of income that we declare, and so the burden is on the taxpayer in those circumstances.

In the model as MPAC has evolved it to the point where it is today, MPAC has the superiority of information on the property; the taxpayer doesn't. As the Ombudsman points out, the taxpayers have been burdened to get as much information as they could use at the ARB hearings or the request for reconsideration. So the analogy to the Income Tax Act, the Ombudsman says, is a false analogy. Manitoba turns it in the opposite direction and says that, in the analogy, MPAC would have to prove it is right instead of the current circumstances where the taxpayer has to prove it's incorrect. We'll see where the government goes on this issue, but I think the Ombudsman makes a very powerful argument that, in these circumstances, with the dominance of information on the side of MPAC, it would be suitable for Ontario's assessment system.

He recognizes there may be an increase in appeals, particularly in the short term, but it also might restore some trust to the system. If there's greater trust in the results that you receive in your envelope when you get your now annual assessment, there is a greater trust in their accuracy that at the end of the day will probably reduce appeals. It may take some time, but it probably would reduce appeals because there would be greater confidence.

So we have a bill before us. The bill will extend the 90-day deadline. Conservative members will be supporting that when we vote later this afternoon. But I would say that at the very least I would hope there would be an acknowledgment by the government members that this is not quick action, that they have repeatedly ignored signals or reports Mike Colle was working on to change the system.

Second, I would hope that they would waive the \$75 fee that currently exists in light of these circumstances with the Ombudsman's report.

Third, I would suggest that they direct MPAC to actually adopt the recommendations by the Ombudsman. Right now, it's a bit nebulous in terms of study and review. MPAC did give a quality response, much greater than the quality that came from the Minister of Finance's office initially, but I think this is a time when the Minister of Finance could actually direct MPAC to adopt those recommendations.

Fourth, go with great speed. I think the opposition would be willing to help in the consultations with respect to the notion of reverse onus that they have in Manitoba and consider adopting that as part of our process.

Let me say this, though: I think it is an important point to bring forward as I pause for a slug of water. The Ombudsman's report, and he acknowledges it himself, deals with the current system as presented to him in the year 2006. In his appendix, though, he talks about—if we get everything that's been suggested and the opposition is successful, and I know Mr. Prue will have some suggestions, some similar and some unique, I'm sure, and if we get our way, I would still argue that fixes an existing system but doesn't address the fundamental problem of current value assessment in an environment of rapidly increasing home values.

The Ombudsman in his appendix 2, on page 64, talks about how his role as Ombudsman confines him to the system as it exists today. He makes some very powerful, well-researched and well-presented conclusions, but his mandate does restrict him from advocating fundamental reform to the system. But if you look at appendix 2, there's a bit of a hint there, maybe a bit of a wink and a nod—he can't say so directly—but I see between the lines that the Ombudsman is calling on legislators to go even further.

Page 64: "A number of individuals and organizations urged wholesale reform of the market value assessment system. They emphasized the volatility and unpredictability of market value assessments. 'Hot' real estate markets result in property owners of modest homes and waterfront properties finding themselves being taxed on substantial unrealized capital gains. This is particularly challenging for those with little ability to pay. A common theme addressed by a multitude of complainants was the immense burden the current system imposes on those on fixed incomes, such as seniors. Some individuals say they may have to sell their homes because of increased taxation. It is not an answer to say to these valued citizens that in their later years, they will have to adjust,

leave the homes they have lived in for decades, and 'downsize.' It has also been suggested that the province's 5% cap on reassessment-related increases for businesses results in inequitable distribution among the commercial class with some businesses"—another issue that hopefully will be addressed, but we'll confine it for now to residential.

He goes on to say in point 180 on page 64, "Some have suggested that one way to stabilize the system would be to introduce a cap on assessment increases, for instance by creating a base year, and limiting future increases to the rate of inflation or to a level that parallels the historic long-term Ontario real estate price index. For instance, in some jurisdictions properties are reappraised at current fair market value only when there is a change of ownership or upon completion of new construction. Some jurisdictions provide that annual assessments only increase up to a set percentage."

The Ombudsman obviously has come forward with a powerful report, cogent in its arguments, very well presented, very well researched and no doubt finally provoking action. I'd argue, I say to my friend from Ancaster, let's not forget about the appendices. Often appendices are dismissed, or you get to them when you get to them. Maybe I've always underestimated the benefit of reading the appendix. Appendix 2, if you read those two paragraphs particularly, I think is a little bit of a signal by the Ombudsman to consider other alternatives, particularly at a time of hot real estate values.

The other thing that I know many members here will be concerned about, and this may be part of another debate, is point 182 on page 65: "We also heard from those in the agricultural field who expressed concerns about the current classification and valuation of farm and related land in the province." It's certainly something that many of my colleagues have brought up and I've brought up in the Legislature and in my discussions with MPAC as well. I know that Toby Barrett, our critic for agriculture, has been a very strong proponent of change in this area. When you see bunkhouses, for example, for migrant workers being reclassified into the residential class of land beneath, that can be a substantial property tax increase for the farmer for something that's not a year-round residence.

We certainly went through this just a year and a half ago with maple syrup producers in parts of Ontario who saw themselves classified as industrial in a prohibitive tax increase.

Mr. McMeekin: We changed that.

Mr. Hudak: The government did respond to that. I'm pleased that they did respond to that.

There is a horse farm issue as well, where the horse farms were classified into the commercial class as opposed to being in the previous class. Let's be straightforward about it. There was an outcry and members on the Liberal side, the PC side and the NDP side brought these issues forward. The taxpayers revolted and we did see—

Mr. McMeekin: We fixed it.

Mr. Hudak: Well, we did see change.

The trailer park issue is an ongoing concern as well, in how they are assessed. We have an ongoing issue with the taxation of wineries in the Niagara Peninsula, and I've said the classification is at too high a level. If you truly want to keep the greenbelt green, you need to invest in value-added agriculture. The benefits are there. So I've argued that for value-added agriculture we should have a lower tax rate than the industrial or commercial class in the circumstances.

Mr. McMeekin: You're right on.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the member saying that I'm right on.

The problem we've seen, though, is a piecemeal approach. It raises up, and if it gets enough momentum behind it, it may provoke change by the Minister of Finance that day by a regulation change.

Mr. McMeekin: I'm with you, Tim. Here's my number; call me when the revolution starts.

Mr. Hudak: Well, good.

My suggestion has been a more comprehensive approach on this issue in finding out where to draw that line between agriculture and when it becomes value-added.

We also have an issue in Grimsby. I know that my colleague from Stoney Creek has also met with the individual with respect to a pottery operation. She has a small pottery operation, Forks Road Pottery. As a result, it's in the industrial class, which is prohibitive for her business. She has written as well to government officials. Marcel Beaubien brought this up in his report on the definition of industrial. I think there are other things that have to be examined in great detail, and hopefully in this 90-day period we may be able to do so as well, and a response to cries from members to look particularly at value-added agriculture.

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The point I was getting to, though, is back to 179 and 180. The Ombudsman said, "Some have suggested that one way to stabilize the system would be to introduce a cap on assessment increases, for instance by creating a base year, and limiting future increases to the rate of inflation or to a level that parallels the historic long-term Ontario real estate price index." He talks about reassessments that would occur when ownership changes or new construction. "Some jurisdictions," the Ombudsman says, "provide that annual assessments only increase up to a set percentage."

I think this is instructive. I do hope that the government will pursue the details, which I really think are a bit of a hint, because the Ombudsman only has so much of a mandate—will pursue these types of suggestions in addition to the Ombudsman's report.

By way of example, a bill exists on the order paper today: Bill 75, the Homestead Act. The Homestead Act, which I introduced a couple of months ago, and do appreciate the great advice I received from colleagues: the members from Wellington and Renfrew and Oak Ridges and Haliburton and Simcoe, among others. I do

remember a meeting in Port Colborne, in Sherston, where many people had faced about a 60% increase in their assessments this past year. Cathy Diplock and Councillor Barb Butters and Councillor Rand had organized this meeting, driving down there in a snowstorm. One fellow said, "Why don't you look at what they do in Michigan?" So I looked at what they do in Michigan. We examined what other states do, and we examined what other provinces do. In a number of states and provinces—Nova Scotia is the province; it does, in fact, have a cap of 10% on assessment increases. Michigan, Florida, California, Oregon, Maryland and parts of New York state, among others, have some form of caps, rebates, tax relief. Some call their legislation the Homestead Act as well. We try to borrow names.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: Then I hope I can count on the member's support when this bill comes up for debate on April 13 for second reading. I hope the member will bring the letter he mentions forward and join with me in calling for the Homestead Act to become law or at least the principles to be adopted by the current government.

The Homestead Act, if passed—and it builds on the advice I received from caucus members, from taxpayers and from investigating other states and provinces; WRAFT, one of the property tax groups, has also given me advice in this respect—would cap assessment increases at 5% per year on residential as long as home ownership was maintained.

In fact, one aspect of that Homestead Act that people may or may not like is, it also allows the transference of the property to family members—children or spouse, specifically—and that cap would be maintained as long as that ownership continues. If the assessment increase is less than 5%, it doesn't go up by 5%, but it would cap out at 5%.

Second, the Homestead Act creates an incentive for home improvements. Currently, homeowners are concerned that repairs and improvements to their homes will result in higher assessments and therefore higher property taxes. Under the Homestead Act, Bill 75, if passed, Ontario homeowners could make up to \$25,000 in home repairs, alterations or improvements or additions without triggering the increase in assessment. This protection basically acts as a deductible for improvements greater than \$25,000, and that's per annum.

Third, it would create a property tax reduction for seniors and the disabled. Under the Homestead Act, seniors and the disabled would not pay property taxes on the first \$10,000 on the principal residence. No municipal, county or provincial education taxes would be set on the first \$10,000 of their home—a modest break if you're wealthy, but I think for seniors on fixed incomes, disabled individuals or families on a fixed income, it'll be helpful to put some more money back in their pockets.

Fourth important point: The Homestead Act would require MPAC to maintain a record of the current assessed value of the land and provide a copy to landowners within 24 hours, free of charge. The Ombudsman

has, I think, even stronger recommendations for sharing information in a timely manner, which could be adopted as part of the Homestead Act.

I do hope that we will receive all-party support when this comes up for debate—within the 90-day time frame, coincidentally, with the help of my colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, Mr. Murdoch, who switched places with me on the order paper very generously, because this will allow members of the assembly to debate this bill during the 90-day extension that we're contemplating tonight.

I know members opposite have said, "Well, you know"—

Mr. McMeekin: He's a big fan of yours. That's why he did it.

Mr. Hudak: Seemingly.

They would say, "Well, Hudak, it was your party that brought MPAC in, so therefore, you have no right to recommend changes," I suppose is the tail end of the argument. Those who were here will remember—I know colleagues who were municipal leaders as well remember—that up until 1997, there really was no provincial assessment system per se. It was a broken system, and no government had the courage to take it on.

We had, for example, in Toronto, land values based in the 1940s. I don't know what they were in the Flamborough area. Niagara had recently been updated; it was the 1990s. Markham, Whitby: 1970s. We were in a bizarre assessment world where people in mansions had lower assessments than young families trying to make it in modest homes. Previous governments balked at fixing the problem. I'm proud to say we took it on, brought forward a system to restore some fairness by ensuring that it was based on current values, and we had a province-wide basis in 1997. The notion of living in mansions with the 1940s values just didn't sit well with taxpayers living in modest homes in Niagara with 1990s values that may have faced higher taxes.

Certainly today, in an environment of rapidly increasing property values, it makes sense to bring caps on how far up an assessment can go annually.

We'll look at some of the values. The average residential price increase in Ontario in 2004 over 2003 was 7.5%—7.5% for the province of Ontario; 7% in the city of Toronto. In 2003: 7.1% in the province of Ontario; 6% in Toronto, Toronto going in 2003 from \$293,308 to \$315,266. I know now, if I had more up-to-date information at hand, for 2005-06 you'd see a continuing pattern of increasing values. It's a hot real estate market. But there are restrictions that the government has brought in on growth and housing that I would say will exacerbate that problem. The Greenbelt Act is one. Whether you like it or not, there is an agreement that if you limit supply, you'll see an increase in residential property values.

Interjection.

Mr. Hudak: You're saying Flamborough's prices are going up.

Mr. McMeekin: And everyone wants to live there.

Mr. Hudak: There you go. Lovely community, no doubt, Flamborough. The member has reason to be proud of it. But I think he'd agree with me that taxpayers in Flamborough or Beamsville or Glanbrook or Toronto are seeing increases in the value of the real estate market that are driving up assessments. That's why we've seen the rapidly increasing assessments. I think the last two assessments, on average: a 30% increase on somebody's home. That's the average, and it's skewed. We have people writing in to us, e-mailing us, who have had double-digit increases or more in the last couple of assessments. So I would argue that it's time for caps to come forward.

Members will remember that in the early 1990s it was the opposite. We actually were in an era in the early 1990s of declining property values. Take 1992, for example: Toronto, minus 9%; 1993, minus 4.0%. Ontario as a whole: minus 6% in 1992; minus 3.2% in 1993. It stayed that way: negatives in 1995 and 1996. It started to grow a bit in 1997, and in 1998 it slowed down again: 1.6% in Ontario; 2.5%, my chart tells me, in Toronto as a whole.

But we're in a different environment today, and I think you have to address legislation to meet the realities of the environment of the day. In an environment of rapidly increasing values resulting in rapidly increasing assessments, I think it makes a lot of sense to bring forward an act like the Homestead Act, as exists in other states and in the province of Nova Scotia, to put caps. I hope the government will smile favourably upon private member's Bill 75, which will be brought forward on April 13.

There has been some favourable coverage, as well. In fact, I'm pleased, I'll say to my colleague from Nipissing, that the council of North Bay, just two nights ago, I believe—it was in the paper, anyway, just yesterday—unanimously endorsed the Homestead Act and called for caps in assessment increases as part of that, and I appreciate what they've said. We've had councillors in Niagara that have been supportive. I mentioned those in Port Colborne as some.

1620

My colleague Norm Miller sent me a letter from Jane MacKinnon and Sally Skinner. Mr. Miller has been advocating very powerfully on behalf of these constituents. He passed on an example of some of the realities his constituents are facing. They say: "Our understanding is that the average increase in the township is 32.42%. Our assessment increased by 177.6%. This is not only ludicrous, as there are no properties like ours that have been sold in the last year, but from where we sit it looks like a smash-and-grab attempt on the part of the government. It is difficult not to be cynical when the last time we had to appeal our assessments on the same property, the island had miraculously increased in size by 50%."

I thank Mr. Miller for bringing this forward. I think Mr. Miller probably sent me about 100 or more pages of concerns on behalf of his constituents.

An e-mail I received just two weeks ago: "Mr. Hudak, I'm an 80-year-old senior with no prospects of increased

income, yet year after year my property tax assessment goes higher and higher with no improvements to my house. In fact, I can't afford improvements or even proper maintenance. I'm sure many senior citizens are in the same boat. We are afraid of losing our homes. Something has to be done to get this out-of-control MPA program under control. I applaud your efforts and hope you will be successful in your efforts to get your Homestead Act passed." I thank that senior for sending in his comments.

Another one, from the city of Toronto:

"Dear Mr. Hudak:

"Property assessments and municipal taxes are out of control. As a real estate professional for the past 25 years, I can assure you that in many instances, my own cottage included, MPAC hasn't a clue what it is doing and is picking assessments using wrong or irrelevant information. Your private member's bill would go a long way towards rectifying the situation and I fully support it."

The Osbornes wrote in on March 12: "Mr. Hudak, kudos to you on your efforts to introduce your Homestead Act bill. My wife and I are in our 70s and on fixed incomes, and the assessment procedure will probably eventually drive us out of our home due to the increasing tax burden. With increased assessment and increasing municipal tax levels occurring every year, we are very fearful of losing our current standard of living just to stay in our own home."

There are many more. I won't dwell on those today. We'll have a chance later in debate, and hopefully we'll see action by the government.

To summarize my comments, we'd be pleased to support this bill, this extension. We're pleased with the agreement among the House leaders that has been honoured to allow debate and a vote to happen this evening. We want to express again our disappointment in the conduct of the finance minister who, in a fit of pique, decided that he wanted to set his own rules in the assembly, despite those that were agreed upon by the three House leaders.

I would ask, though, further, as part of this 90-day review, to waive the \$75 appeal fee, given the circumstances. I would also ask the Minister of Finance or the Premier to direct MPAC to adopt the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

Thirdly, I hope there will be some speed. I think you can do thorough consultations, but you can also do them in a time-sensitive manner with respect to the reverse onus provisions from Manitoba and the issues with proprietary interest between Teranet and MPAC, and I can assure the minister that, as finance critic, I will assist in those consultations to the best of my ability.

Most importantly, I ask the members of the assembly—the government members, the third party and members of my own caucus—to get behind the Homestead Act, which I view as a more permanent approach to ensuring that there is some control on how far assessments can go in an era of rapidly increasing property values. I would say again that the share of taxes would

still go up for those individuals who live in the higher-valued homes. It would do so, however, in a more predictable, more stable, and certainly much slower level of ascent that we've seen in the last two assessments.

That concludes my comments for this evening, and I do hope we'll see action by the government on the recommendations of the PC caucus.

The Acting Speaker: It is now time for questions and comments.

Mr. Prue: I thought if I made my two-minute comment, I could omit these things from my own speech, and I'm next.

I'd just like to talk about three things that the member from Erie-Lincoln had to say. The first is to concur with him in his assessment of what happened yesterday in terms of when there was an attempt for this bill to be called. Quite frankly, on behalf of the third party, we had a signed letter and an understanding of what was going to happen. I will tell you, it caused some considerable angst to have a minister of the crown stand up and go contrary to what the deputy House leader had agreed to with all three parties.

We all know the necessity of passing this bill and we all agreed that it would be passed today after one scant day of debate. What was done by the Minister of Finance around this issue was not parliamentary. I praised him in my last two-minute; I think he should be ashamed of what he attempted to do yesterday. The caucus should tell him that when we have made arrangements so that this House can work properly, when the House leaders sit down and make arrangements so that this place, which is often chaotic, can work better, we need to do that. We cannot have one-upmanship. We cannot have someone like him standing up and trying to make the rules on his own. I hope he never does it again. I hope the members of the caucus explain that this House works best when we have all-party agreement on how debates are going to go. It always works best and it's not nearly so rancorous as it has been in the past. I would hope he has learned a valuable lesson.

The second—I'm only going to get two in—is to agree with my honourable friend about the whole history of this. When these questions were first asked, the Premier said he was not going to deal with it, as did the finance minister at the time. That has caused some of the difficulties and some of where we are at today, because when it was raised and broached in this House before, there was simply no government action at that time.

Mr. Tim Peterson (Mississauga South): It's a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill.

One of the unforeseen effects of MPAC is that the municipalities, in areas of inflation, have received a windfall. They blame us, the province, for the hardship it imposes upon the residents. That was never intended to be any part of any legislation.

We in this House try to achieve accountability. If we're going to increase taxes or if we're going to have revenue, we want to show the people how it's being spent. We, the province, are being blamed for the benefit

being given to the municipality. I think we can look forward to keeping that discussion going.

I would like to thank the member from Erie-Lincoln, a namesake of mine, for being so reasonable on a Thursday afternoon. I'm not sure if he's worn down on a Thursday, but I thought his presentation was excellent, I thought his reasonableness was sound and I looked forward to what he had to say.

There are solutions to this—

Mr. McMeekin: It's an unusual afternoon all around.

Mr. Peterson: I think he holds me in good stead to follow him.

There are solutions to this hardship caused by rapid inflation. In Florida, they fix the cost at time of sale and they don't re-evaluate the property until the next sale. Other people are recommending this 5% increase per year.

I think as we go forward, it behooves us all who are for this, because all of us know many people who are caused hardship and angst by this, because it's very hard to plan their budgets, especially for those on limited incomes.

I look forward to working with the other members on this.

Mr. Arnott: The member for Erie-Lincoln has offered the House this afternoon a very insightful and interesting presentation about Bill 85 on behalf of our caucus. Of course, as finance critic, he does a good job representing our views.

This is an important issue. This bill will allow for a 90-day extension for assessment appeals. I'm pleased that the government is bringing forward this bill as well, but I must say that, to some degree, the political purpose of this bill on the part of the government is to attempt to be appearing to achieve fairness for property taxpayers. They would like the public to believe that they are trying to move in that direction.

1630

I'm pleased that the member for Erie-Lincoln talked about his private member's bill. I think it's an important bill that needs to be discussed in the context of Bill 85. Certainly, if there was a 5% cap on assessment-related property tax increases, that would provide a great deal of relief to people who are experiencing skyrocketing increases in property taxes in the absence of his private member's bill.

I think it's also fair to look back a couple of years in the context of this discussion. The member for Erie-Lincoln will recall that when our party was in government, we brought forward legislation which would provide for a significant property tax reduction for seniors. Our seniors' property tax rebate would have eliminated the provincial portion of property taxes for seniors: about 25% of the average property tax bill. We passed that legislation before the government changed, and one of the first acts of the new government was of course to repeal that, which resulted in a massive property tax increase for some of our most vulnerable taxpayers, our seniors.

So far, that hasn't come up in debate. I'm sure most of the government members are rather ashamed of that step that their government took right off the bat. But I would hope that over the course of this debate, that point will be made, and perhaps consideration will be given to do more to help the property tax ratepayers who are also senior citizens and who are on fixed incomes.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Seeing none, the Chair recognizes the member from Erie—Lincoln for a response.

Mr. Hudak: I appreciate the kind comments by Beaches—East York, Mississauga South, my namesake—the middle names are different, though, I think.

Ms. Jennifer F. Mossop (Stoney Creek): Your last names are different too.

Mr. Hudak: It is a common last name, though. He has a bit more of a common last name.

I thank Mississauga South for his kind comments, and I listened with interest to his discussion of the Florida Homestead Act. I find it very encouraging that members opposite have also obviously been doing homework on this issue. I commend the member for Mississauga South for the research he's obviously put into the issue of assessment increases.

Waterloo—Wellington: of course a very strong advocate for taxpayers in his riding and a very strong advocate for the welfare of seniors particularly. He raises an important point about the seniors' tax credit being rescinded as part of Dalton McGuinty's tax increase budget. They would have had the education property taxes forgiven in significant part by the legislation that had been passed under the Ernie Eves government, and that was taken away by one of Dalton McGuinty's first bills. I thank him for entering that into debate as well.

Beaches—East York I know has done a great deal of work on this issue as well with his own task force. He has raised this issue a number of times in question period. I look forward to his presentation as we are concluding debate on this bill this evening.

I do hope the government members who are listening, and I'm pleased that they have had the courtesy to do so, will join with me in pushing for changes like those in the homestead act, and as well bringing forward the advice of the official opposition with respect to the filing fee. An actual direction from the Minister of Finance or the Premier to MPAC will do—I do give MPAC credit for a very well researched and weighty response—to direct them to implement the changes.

The Acting Speaker: Further debate?

Mr. Prue: I'd like to start by commending the Ombudsman for the province of Ontario, Mr. Morin. He has done an absolutely masterful job, in some 65 short pages, of outlining the difficulties with property assessment and with MPAC. He has detailed I think the frustrations of the citizenry of this province.

I don't think I can do any better than quote what he had to say in his press release: "Never in the 30-year history of this office have so many complaints been received in so short a period about a single public

agency," he said. "Our office was inundated with protests from disaffected citizens—more than 3,700 of them."

We know from his 22 recommendations that he has set out, quite clearly, to fix the system. The first question all of us need to ask ourselves—the first question he I think posed in his very last paragraph, in the appendices, his very last couple of sentences, set out the problem: "It is clear that the current assessment system is far from perfect, and I urge the government to engage in a process of review to consider the many concerns and options available with respect to the property assessment system in Ontario."

So even his 22 recommendations, he acknowledges, are not finite. Even he acknowledges that there is a lot more that needs to be done, and can be done, to make the property assessment system, or a variant of it, fairer to ordinary taxpayers.

Last fall in this House, when the complaints were starting and were getting very strong, and the Premier had already been quoted in newspapers as saying that he was going to take no action on property assessment, I asked the Premier and the finance minister precisely what the Liberal platform, the Liberal agenda, on this very item was going to be. I have to tell you that, on the day I asked what I thought was a very poignant question to the taxpayers of this province, I was ridiculed. I was ridiculed by the minister, who said he wasn't going to do anything about the problems they were enunciating. I was ridiculed and laughed at by many of the caucus members, with the catcalls that go on here every day. Quite frankly, there seemed to be no government appetite whatsoever to look at the horrendous problem that ordinary citizens were facing in this province.

I am glad that the Ombudsman has come forward with this report because we are starting, for the first time, to see some forms of action into either fixing or potentially I hope changing the system that for so many simply does not work.

When the minister said that he was not going to do anything about the tax system, I took it upon my own volition, with the help of my caucus and some members of the New Democratic Party, to set up a small task force to go around the province and try to ask ordinary citizens how they thought the system could be made better. I was ridiculed by the minister for doing that in this very House. In fact, he said, "Who are your experts? What kind of people are these? What kind of economists are they?" They are ordinary and very good citizens. We have been working together with these ordinary and good citizens to try to find out from ordinary Ontarians how we can fix the system.

Much of what we have been told—as a matter of fact, everything we have been told—has been contained within the body of Mr. Marin's report: all of the horror stories, all of the suggestions, all the things that may or may not be done and how it will impact upon the treasury. We've talked to ordinary citizens and groups and we continue to do so.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the members of my committee who have been going around. We have been

to Ottawa and we will be going back there again. We have been to Toronto and we will be coming back here again. There will be future meetings in London, in Sudbury and in cottage country, probably in Peterborough, to talk to citizens about how MPAC has impacted upon them and how the property assessment system might be fixed, or cancelled in favour of some other system.

The members of the task force include myself; Mr. Jeff Atkinson from Ottawa; Ethel Birkett-LaValley from Lake Saint Peter, and she is the reeve there; Chris Charlton, who at the time was an ordinary citizen but now is a Member of Parliament for the Hamilton area; Alex Cullen, who was a member of this Legislature and who is now a councillor in the city of Ottawa; and Tam Goossen, who was a member of the school board, formerly, in the city of Toronto.

We have spent a lot of time talking to people. What I'm going to suggest today is not only what the Ombudsman had to say but in fact what we have heard ourselves in these many, many meetings and discussions.

When we set up the task force and the minister refused to listen, I did get contacted by a newspaper. The minister likes to wave that little article around, that I wasn't going to discuss anything with his party. Well, of course I wasn't. I made concrete suggestions in this House as part of a government, and I made that as part of my legislative duty. He said the government wasn't going to take any action at all and had no desire to change any part of the MPAC process or of property value assessment. If he has changed his mind and wants input, I would be very glad to give it to him today. If he wants to simply say this and continue to ridicule my group, I have no desire whatsoever to participate in what he is requesting.

1640

We have, as I said, gone to all those places. We have also set up a website. I don't know whether we're into the thousands yet, but we're certainly into many hundreds of thoughtful responses on our website called www.ouchassessment.ca. We set it up and people send in their horror stories. They send in their suggestions on how the system can be improved. We will continue to work on those and hope to be able to report to the people of Ontario some time later in the spring.

Also, if you wish, I would be more than willing to release our findings to this House, something I wish had happened with Mike Colle's report, because I will not be ashamed of what I am going to write. What I am going to write, although it has been prepared by members of the New Democratic Party, is for public consumption, something that I think the honourable minister—he wasn't the minister then—should have done, and something that should have been released by the finance minister. If what was said was cogent and pertinent to what we are discussing, then surely all of us should have seen it, not just the finance minister, to bury it.

I want to tell you the solutions. What is different, I think, in our report and what is different perhaps that this Legislature can do, is that we can make and we should be

making alternative suggestions. The Ombudsman, as I said, did a brilliant job. He did a very good job based on the circumstances as he found them, on how to make a bad situation—on how to bring an organization which I believe he thought was out of control, into control, to make it more democratic, to make it a public institution. But he left it virtually unscathed in terms of its *raison d'être*, in terms of what it was going to do and how it was going to act, although he certainly did give ways for them to act more appropriately. But he did not say that it should be scrapped or that market value assessment or CVA should be scrapped in favour of another system. He didn't go as far as I think many citizens might wish, and I'm going to deal with that in a moment.

Let's deal with some editorial opinion, because today two major newspapers have talked about where we need to go with this.

Mr. Peterson: Michael, it's Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Prue: I know it's Thursday afternoon. I've only been up for 10 minutes, and I promise I will be finished well within the hour—

Mr. David Zimmer (Willowdale): Finish in the next two or three minutes.

Mr. Prue: No, contrary to what the member from Willowdale is requesting, I will not finish in two or three minutes because these things need to be said. They need to be said because every time I ask questions the finance minister belittles what is being said. I have my time to elaborate, and if he did not ridicule me, I would not have the necessity to elaborate. So I'm going to elaborate. If you are upset about that, please speak to that man.

The Ottawa Citizen today has said:

"MPAC's deep problem is that it treasures corporate imperatives (revenues, protecting the brand name, resisting criticism) over public ones (service, openness, accountability).

"If Ontario must use property taxes to keep funding its municipalities, instead of switching to a more rational income tax system, it needs a property assessment agency citizens can rely on." I think that's a mistake; I think that should be "upon." "Without a culture change that will be very difficult to create, MPAC is not that agency."

So what the Ottawa Citizen is saying is that we should scrap MPAC, that it's beyond salvageability.

The Toronto Star has said much the same thing. Just to quote the last couple of lines of its editorial of today: "What is needed is leadership to ensure sweeping changes are made by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. And if the agency fails to agree to all of the recommendations, then Queen's Park should consider hiring another outside firm to do the work."

These are pretty damning editorials, because what they are saying is that the agency that was set up some seven or eight years ago has failed, that it may be beyond repair, that it may have to be replaced, that the system itself may have to be replaced. I would tell you that the editorial opinion surprises me, because I've not seen this kind of angst before, I have not seen this kind of anger

before, and the Ombudsman's report has brought that all through.

I also look to what other kinds of discussions are taking place. There was a story in yesterday's paper, again from the *Ottawa Citizen*, which quotes the mayor of Ottawa, who was previously a member in this House and is the mayor of the second-largest city in this province. The mayor did a couple of things, and I'm going to read again from this newspaper report. Chiarelli urged the province to freeze the property tax assessment for two years to allow a public review. Councillor Alex Cullen went on to talk—I'm going to talk about him later, but what the mayor said is that the Ombudsman's report missed a major issue, and that major issue was, in fact, whether or not the property assessment corporation should be scrapped.

In today's *Toronto Sun*, there is a letter from Lionel Miskin, VP and chairman of the property tax committee of the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, and we all know how important they are. He says, "There is something inherently wrong in a tax system which forces people out of their properties, and it is that aspect of CVA which really needs to be addressed." A very wise man.

I'd like to go back to some of the solutions that we've heard from ordinary people, solutions that could work and work very quickly if this province had a mind to do it.

The first thing we need to do is consider reducing the property taxes that people pay. Some \$3.3 billion of the property taxes paid in this province that come from the taxpayer go to provincial coffers for provincially mandated programs. Those programs are child care, which is laudable; assisted housing, which is laudable; welfare, which is necessary and laudable; ambulance services, which are necessary and laudable; and public health. No one would say that we should not be spending the \$3.3 billion that is raised from property taxes on those necessary and laudable goals, but what ordinary citizens are telling us is that they do not have the capacity within their property to pay for that. They do not have the wherewithal in many cases, if they are on a fixed income, elderly or unemployed, to pay property taxes for provincially mandated programs. What they are telling us, to a person, if they understand this, is that they believe the province has to take control of its own duties and its own expenses. They are telling us, to a person, that we need to upload the download, that they can no longer and should no longer be expected to pay that from their property taxes.

They are telling us as well that they are puzzled as to why the province continues to take some \$5 billion or \$6 billion every year to pay for education from the property tax, because all the key decisions on how the education money is spent are not within the confines of the local municipal council or the school board, be it separate or public, French-speaking or English-speaking; they are made by the Minister of Education. If the minister is to control the purse strings and tell the teachers and school boards how the money is to be spent, then the money

should come from provincial and not from municipal coffers. If those were uploaded, more than half of the money that people spend for their municipal taxes would be gone. Their property taxes would be halved. You can imagine how people would react to that. People would think that was a very good thing. The people who would be most affected—because the money, of course, would have to be found from corporate taxes, income taxes, sales taxes or other sources—the people who would benefit the most are those who are least able to afford it.

1650

I met an older woman today of Italian ancestry who did not speak very good English. She came to me this morning and asked if I could help her. She had a property tax assessment form in her hand. She could not understand why her property tax had been re-evaluated some 15.5% on the basis of her house. I looked at her house. I went there and had a look at it. Her house is a semi on a quiet little street in the East York area. To my mind, I was shocked that the assessors thought it was worth \$450,000. She will not be able to afford the property tax increase that comes with that. She will not be able to afford the 3% that Toronto is going to pass in their budget, plus the additional 4.5% she is going to be hit with because someone somewhere on a computer model thinks that her house is worth that much. That is just one case in this province, and there are tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands just like it.

I go on to think about what we can do. I've talked about the upload, the download. The second thing this government should do, and carefully look at, is to pass into legislation immediately what the Ombudsman has talked about: Once an appeal is made and launched and won, that appeal has to carry weight. I know and you all know, if you've ever done property tax appeals, that you can win a case and have to go back to fight the same case the next year.

In fact, I went back three years in a row to fight a case on Mortimer Avenue for a Greek-speaking gentleman who asked me as his local councillor to assist him. I went there three years in a row, I argued the same points three years in a row, and we won his case three years in a row. Every year, the same thing would happen. He would win, and the next year MPAC would reassess his property at the old rate, plus whatever percentage they thought it went up. The arguments we made were always the same. We compared his property to the other properties on the street; we used the same ones. We compared his street, which is a busy avenue, close to Toronto East General Hospital and the fire station, so he was constantly interrupted by that stuff. We compared his one-and-a-half-storey home to two-storey homes, which the assessor said MPAC was completely wrong in doing, and we continued to win that. But every year that poor man, who was a pensioner, had to fork out the \$75, had to go to the appeal, had to win, knowing full well that the following year he would have to do it all over again.

Mr. Marin is correct. That needs to be changed, and changed now. When I asked the questions today about this very item—it has to be reviewed.

"We're worried about privacy," the finance minister says. "We want to hear from the municipalities that are going to be affected. We want this, we want that, we want this." Well, I'll tell you, the taxpayers out there who are going to appeals want justice and they want a fair opportunity. They want to know that when they win, they win not just once, that they're not going to be stuck again, with glee, the following year.

The third point I want to talk about is changing the rules and not divulging them. I've done appeals too. I did an appeal for a gentleman who owned a commercial property on Danforth Avenue near Main. They changed the rules. They wouldn't tell him with whom they were comparing his property or on what property it was being compared. When he showed how much money he had spent for the property, they told him that didn't count, because their assessment and their computer model was the right one. When I argued with the adjudicator before the ARB, the adjudicator refused to see that, because, you see, the computer model is sacrosanct. Mr. Marin has it right: It cannot be sacrosanct, because no one can gain access to it.

Fourthly, he says to reverse the onus. This is something that this minister and this government can do immediately. This is not going to change any part of the legislation except to affect Canadian law to recognize that this is, in fact, not an appeal. It is not an appeal against a decision, because there was no original decision to which the individual taxpayer was a party. This is a simple one-off day in court to argue whether or not an assessment was proper. It is the first opportunity a property owner has to make sure that he or she is being treated fairly.

Mr. Marin described it, and I'm going to find it because he has used brilliant words. Mr. Marin described the current system this way: "At a hearing in Ontario, the onus is not on MPAC to explain its assessment and show why it is right; it is on the taxpayer to show that MPAC's assessment is wrong. Even though this is the practice in all provinces other than Manitoba, it is an ossified or antiquated practice that can no longer be justified. First, at an ARB hearing the taxpayers are not alleging a wrongdoing by MPAC, are simply saying MPAC got the assessment wrong. An ARB hearing is not, in other words, like a civil suit where the party making an allegation of wrongdoing should have to prove it." I think the minister should act on this sooner rather than later. "There are tens of thousands of appeals and there will be tens of thousands more when this is extended for 90 days. I am asking that this recommendation be implemented almost immediately."

I want to tell you that there has been some argument that we can't do it that fast. Well, pretty fast to get this legislation here today following my question, but I'm not that naive, because I know, and the public should know, that the minister had the Ombudsman's report for the better part of a month. We got it the day before yesterday, but the minister had it for the better part of a month, so one ought not to be too surprised when he was

able to react to my question in question period the way he did, because he had already sent back a letter a week before this was made public, telling Mr. Marin that he was going to study a number of issues.

I'd just like to talk about what the member from Erie-Lincoln is talking about, the Homestead Act. I would agree that is a partial answer to what is going on. Are caps the answer? I don't know, because, you see, in the United States where caps have been used, yes, they save the taxpayers money whose properties go up, but they also take away from the treasuries of those states, so that some of the treasuries, like California, which is the classic example, have seen that they no longer have the money to carry out the necessary goals and objectives of the state legislature.

California has slipped from the top 10 in terms of the money spent per capita on students to the bottom five. They've done that because when you cap that, as they do at 2%, it means that properties that would otherwise be assessed to a larger amount no longer pay the increased property tax, and each and every year since the capping took place, revenues in California from property tax have declined to the extent that California now has a worse road system, and certainly has a worse education system. If we are going to cap, then we also have to cap the decreases as well as the increases.

That was done at the time of the initial market value assessment in all cities, and I can speak most clearly about the city of Toronto. There was a cap on how fast your increased taxes could go up, but there was also a cap on the decrease. It was phased in over a number of years to make sure that the actual revenues that were collected were neutral to the municipality and that the many wonderful works municipalities do were not compromised, and at the same time to make sure the municipalities did not get a windfall. That's what my friend from Mississauga South had to say, that the cities get a windfall. In fact, they do not. Cities did not get a windfall from this, provided there was a cap on both ends.

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I want to say as well that we need to look at other options. I have not heard anyone else speak of other options, and there are many that work very, very well.

To quote my colleague, who was quoted in yesterday's *Ottawa Citizen*—he talked at great length about the Ombudsman's report. It's only one paragraph long:

"Bay Ward councillor Alex Cullen also warned that the Ombudsman's report was only part of the solution. He said the real problem lies in the principle of using value-based assessment to determine a homeowner's tax liability. 'Market value has nothing to do with the cost of municipal services or the ability to pay, and quite frankly, this whole system needs to be reformed,' he said. Cullen argued there are other assessment models, including income bracket, square footage and replacement value, that would be more rational."

I have to tell you, I think that all of these need to be studied. We have heard much about capping, we've seen some discussion of it in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper

and we've heard the Homestead Act. But there are options that will work equally as well or probably better in the long term than simply capping increases.

I want to say, though, that capping did work for the city of Toronto and for other locations. When the previous government saw that there was a firestorm of protests by people—ordinary citizens—who were in commercial and industrial structures, who thought their taxes were going through the roof, those taxes were all capped, and remain capped. By and large, that has worked. What did not happen at that time was, the citizens were not afforded the same consideration, probably because they were not as noisy. If capping works for one and continues for one, certainly it should be included for others. But as I earlier said, there are certainly other methods and methodology by which it could be done.

The minister has responded speedily with the 90 days, and we will be supporting the bill in about five minutes, if any of you are wondering. However, I just want to conclude by saying that the speed of response on this issue, for a 90-day period in which to appeal assessments, should be met with equally speedy responses on all of the other aspects of Marin's position and what needs to be done.

We need to speedily, before the appeals are heard, change the onus. I've talked of that: The onus needs to be changed so that an ordinary citizen is not fighting the David and Goliath battle that the Ombudsman spoke about here. If the citizen has an opportunity to present an appeal, to show that the assessment made by the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. is unreasonable, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp. must be able to justify it; they have to produce the necessary papers to justify it, rather than the reverse. If Manitoba can do it, and if all it takes is a couple of wording changes, I don't see how that cannot be done.

Full disclosure: The minister has talked about privacy. I cannot, for the life of me, see how privacy is involved, because any citizen, resident, any person in this room, any person in Canada can go to the real estate multiple listings and look at any property that's been sold. You can look at it; any property. There are full details inside about the hundreds of thousands of properties that are sold every year. It tells you how big the rooms are, whether the kitchen has been upgraded, whether there's broadloom on the floors. It tells you whether there's a gravity furnace or a new, high-energy-efficiency furnace. It tells you how-many-car garage; it tells you whether there is a mother-in-law suite. It tells you everything. I don't know where the privacy is, because any one of us can find out those details.

You know, the sad thing is, when you go to the ARB, they refuse to take that evidence; they refuse it.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon (Scarborough–Rouge River): Right.

Mr. Prue: My colleague here from Scarborough–Rouge River is indicating, "Right." They refuse to take

that information. But we can all find that out, and I fail to understand how privacy is involved.

I fail to understand, too, the \$4.6 million that MPAC makes from farming out this information to insurance companies—\$4.6 million. There are almost 4.6 million properties in this province. So if every property owner paid an extra dollar, everything could be released. I'm not going to advocate that you increase everybody's taxes by a dollar, but I'm just telling you that this is the amount of money that is involved: \$4.6 million they make from the insurance companies by hoarding that little secret, or have a completely open and accessible unit so that everybody knows what's going on. If they can't sell it to the insurance companies, well, then I guess that's tough. If they need to find \$4.6 million from treasury, maybe we should find it.

I also think we need to upload the download; I've talked about that. If you can take \$3.3 million in the short term and maybe \$10 million off the downloaded services, off the municipal property tax, and put it where it more rightly belongs, then the people screaming about the evaluations of their house and the constant evaluations upward will not have quite the same volume or resonance. We have to look as well at optional forms of financing; of course, that goes along with that.

Just to close, Ontario has the second-highest property assessment taxation in the world. The only place that has a higher one is Great Britain. We are the worst in Canada. We are worse than every single state in the United States. We are worse than all the OECD countries. We are worse than Japan. We rely on an antiquated form of taxation for municipalities—an antiquated form of taxation that is meted unfairly to tenants, to property owners, to small businesses. We need to start looking at refinancing our cities and refinancing how we get the money.

The fairest forms of taxation are on the ability to pay, not on the inability to pay. The fairest forms of taxation will understand that a new business owner who doesn't make any profit cannot afford to pay usurious taxes on a property when he's not making any profit. The fairest form of taxation understands that people on fixed income, like the lady I saw today of Italian ancestry, cannot afford to pay that. Those who earn money, either through working or through investments or however they do it, can rightly afford to pay it if they have it.

We need as a society to get away from taxation which is wrong-headed and mean-spirited and towards progressive taxation. As a government, that's what I'm asking the minister to do. We will be supporting the 90 days, but I will tell him that within the 90 days, and before the 90 days are up, I will be on my feet asking for the balance of Mr. Marin's recommendations to be implemented, and for the minister to be going farther and much beyond that to change a system of taxation that we all know needs to be improved.

The Acting Speaker: It's time for questions and comments.

Ms. Laurie Scott (Haliburton–Victoria–Brock): It's a pleasure today to come and address Bill 85, municipal property assessment reform, and the extension of the original appeal deadline by 90 days, from March 31 to June 30.

Being elected in 2003, and looking back in Hansard, one of the very first statements that I did make in the Legislature was on MPAC, at that point on trailer park assessments. I know that we appealed to the Minister of Finance at that time to make changes, and worked with the industry closely. The industry was told to back off demonstrations. They had a demonstration planned for Queen's Park, and they were told to back off, that they would be working behind the scenes with the Ministry of Finance. Fair enough. But to date, we still have not got reform to the trailer park assessments that the industry was promised. I think this is a good time for the Minister of Finance to look at that reassessment and to fix those problems.

I know that members on all sides—and I commend the member for Erie–Lincoln and the member from Beaches–East York today for their comments. The member from Beaches–East York has done a lot of work on the MPAC issue.

The opposition parties did get some changes that the government did make on the sugar bush, the maple syrup industry, on managed forest tax incentive programs and on equestrian centres. We were able to get some relief, and I'm hoping that they are going to continue this with the extension of the appeal, because they know there's a big problem. In Haliburton county, which had the largest single increase in assessments in the province of Ontario—I know many of the members opposite have cottages up in Haliburton and they understand what I'm saying in the fact that the assessments went skyrocketing this year on waterfronts. So they're concerned. I'm concerned. I have people on fixed incomes, and suddenly their assessments have gone up and they're not able to stay in their homes.

We welcome the extension that's presented, and we hope there's more work to be done.

The Acting Speaker: Further questions and comments? Seeing none, response from the member from Beaches–East York.

Mr. Prue: I thank the member for Haliburton–Victoria–Brock, and just to let her know, I think this House may at last have seized upon an issue that we can all agree upon. All of us must be getting the calls and letters and e-mails from our constituents. All of us in the last few days must have had renewed activity around people who have read the report. All of us need to know that we have citizens who are very vulnerable on this issue. If we can work together, perhaps—I hope—something can come of all of this.

I hope the Minister of Finance will not drag his feet. I can only hope that he will bring forward the necessary legislation to change the onus, to make sure that everything is released and releasable to those who need it to do their appeals, and in the longer term can look at alternatives for financing that will benefit all the citizens of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker: Mr. Phillips has moved second reading of Bill 85. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

The bill is therefore ordered for third reading.

MORE TIME TO APPEAL ACT, 2006 LOI DE 2006 PORTANT PROROGATION DU DÉLAI D'APPEL

Mr. Phillips, on behalf of Mr. Duncan, moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 85, An Act to amend the Assessment Act / Projet de loi 85, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation foncière.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Joseph N. Tascona): Debate? Seeing none, is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Hon. Gerry Phillips (Minister of Government Services): I move adjournment of the House.

The Acting Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

This House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 3, 2006.

The House adjourned at 1713.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Stoney Creek	Mossop, Jennifer F. (L)		

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Une liste alphabétique des noms des députés, comprenant toutes les responsabilités de chaque député, figure dans les premier et dernier numéros de chaque session et le premier lundi de chaque mois.

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